

Spanish king's daughter expecting first child

Madrid (AP) — Princess Elena, the daughter of King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia of Spain, is expecting her first child, the couple announced Thursday. Elena is the first grandchild of the Spanish monarch, who is 60. The king and queen are both 60. The couple have three children: Prince Felipe, 33, who is the heir to the throne; Princess Letizia, 31, who is married to a Spanish businessman; and Prince Leonor, 10, who is the youngest child.

Schumacher's wife helps end fan's obsession

London (AP) — Michael Schumacher's wife, Corinna, helped end a fan's obsession with the Formula 1 driver. The fan, who had been following Schumacher for years, was found dead in his car. Corinna said she had been talking to the fan and trying to help him. She said she was very sad about the death.

Singer Toni Braxton seeks protection from bankruptcy

Los Angeles (AP) — Grammy-winning singer Toni Braxton filed for bankruptcy protection in federal court. Braxton, 28, has been struggling financially for some time. She has a net worth of about \$10 million. She has been married to her husband, Tony Danza, for 10 years. They have three children.

Gates' home still bugs to iron out

Washington (AP) — The push to build the world's most advanced computer, the Microsoft-backed project, is still plagued by bugs to iron out. The project, which is being led by Bill Gates, is expected to be completed by 2000. It will be a major milestone in the history of computing.

Warhol's 'Orange Marilyn' on block in May

New York (AP) — "Orange Marilyn," the most famous of Andy Warhol's silkscreened portraits, is set to go on sale during an auction. The portrait, which was created in 1964, is one of the most valuable works of art in the world. It is expected to fetch a price of over \$100 million.

Israeli warplanes hit guerrilla bases in south Lebanon

MARJAYOUN (AP) — Israeli warplanes blasted suspected guerrilla bases in southern Lebanon on Sunday, Lebanese security officials said. There was no immediate report of casualties. Later, Israeli artillery shells hit three houses in the town of Mashghara. Security officials said that two women and a child were injured and taken to hospitals. They were identified as Mariam Ammar, 35; Zahra Sharaf, 23, and Adnan Khalil, 4. In the air raid, Israeli fighter-bombers fired two air-to-surface missiles at Hizbollah mountain positions of the guerrilla group near the village of Aqmat in the Iqlim Al Tuffah province, a Hizbollah stronghold, the security officials said on condition of anonymity.

Volume 23 Number 6753

AMMAN MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1998, SHAWAL 5, 1418

Price: Jordan 200 fils

Jordan will not allow use of territory or airspace to attack Iraq — minister

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordan reiterated on Sunday that it will not allow American forces to use its territories or airspace to launch attacks on Iraq, a senior cabinet minister said after His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, met with Russian president's special envoy to Iraq, Viktor Posuvalyuk, who was en route to Baghdad on Sunday.

"Jordan will not be a base and will not serve as a passage for any American action against Iraq," said the minister, who requested anonymity.

"We will not allow any party to use Jordanian territories as a base to hit Iraq. This is our position and it is known to all parties," he told the Jordan Times in response to a question.



Crown Prince Hassan welcomes Russian special envoy Viktor Posuvalyuk on his arrival at Basman Palace in Amman on Sunday. Mr. Posuvalyuk was on his way to Baghdad in a new effort to defuse the crisis between Iraq and the U.N. (Reuters photo)

Regent voices Jordan's hope for Russia's efforts to save Iraq war

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, has said Jordan supports a peaceful solution to the Iraqi crisis and an end to the suffering of the Iraqi people.

The Regent said Jordan also supports whatever progress that can be achieved on the Israeli-Palestinian track towards the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

In an interview with Jordan Television and the London-based Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) television which will be broadcast today, Prince Hassan expressed hope that Russia's efforts and diplomatic endeavours will achieve a solution that would save Iraq and the region more wars and further sufferings.

"I believe that dialogue is underway with the Iraqi officials and I hope that the problem at hand will be discussed with further concentration on full compliance with U.N. resolutions particularly with regard to what is called the weapons inspection regime," the Regent said.

Prince Hassan said: "I would like to stress that this commitment [on the part of Iraq] represents the hope to the other side, which is important to us in this region as Arabs, and that is the humanitarian approach."

"The U.N. today speaks about allowing Iraq to sell \$5 billion of oil every six months to buy food and I hope that the Russian envoy will succeed in his good offices. This is not a mediation effort but rather an initiative on the part of the U.N. Security Council reminding us of the immediate and remote past."

"I hope that Iraq will respond favourably to these initiatives at this stage because as His Majesty King Hussein has said in his message addressed to me on Saturday and to the Jordanian and Arab people, that the American position has become clear with regard to a military strike and the escalation of these strikes, which I believe, Iraq will not be able to withstand neither are we in this region able to endure such a disaster," the Crown Prince said.

In reply to a question about current efforts and the required measures on the part of all the different parties to the crisis between Baghdad and the U.N. and to end the suffering of the Iraqi people, Prince Hassan said: "In our conversation with the U.N. Security Council — and Jordan is very active in this respect with all concerned parties — and my contacts with the Iranian and Turkish presidents, I believe there is a unanimity on the question of safeguarding Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Everyone is in agreement that there is a crisis which should be contained... and I believe that our friends in Russia share with us the view that no one can predict the consequences of a military strike."

Albright announces new talks in Washington between Israel, PNA

Combined agency dispatches

U.S. SECRETARY of State Madeleine Albright announced Sunday that Israeli and Palestinian officials would hold a new round of talks in Washington next week on ways to break the deadlock in the peace process.

Ms. Albright, speaking at a press conference following talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, said the stalemate in peace negotiations had gone on "far too long."

"Far too much is at stake for this to go on," she said.

U.S. officials said Ms. Albright had presented Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat with "new ideas" concerning long-overdue Israeli pullbacks from the West Bank and Palestinian measures to counter militant violence.

Israeli and Palestinian officials indicated that the ideas had provided no breakthrough.

Ms. Albright said Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Arafat had, however, agreed to send emissaries to Washington late next week to follow up on our discussions this weekend.

"The issues are difficult and complex," she said. "I have no illusion about how challenging difficulties are."

Meanwhile, a Palestinian official said that Mr. Arafat rejected ideas for a step-by-step Israeli troop withdrawal in the West Bank during the talks with Ms. Albright.

President Arafat "rejected the ideas, telling Albright they adopted the position" of Mr. Netanyahu, said the Palestinian official, who asked not to be named.

Ms. Albright underlined that the step-by-step proposition was "not an official American proposal, merely ideas. She said that in two weeks the United States would announce an official

Iraq starts missile talks with U.N. arms experts amidst threats of 'substantial' military action 'within weeks'

Iraq no longer poses a military threat to anyone, Albright does not lay down the law — French interior minister

Combined agency dispatches

UNITED NATIONS missile experts met Iraqi government officials in Baghdad on Sunday, launching the first in a series of talks which Iraq hopes will show it has fully dismantled its weapons of mass destruction.

U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) weapons inspectors Nikita Smidovich and Iraq's Oil Minister Amir Muhammad Rusheed began five days of talks on the remains of Iraq's "special warheads," capable of carrying biological and chemical payloads.

Their talks started as the United States repeated warnings it could use military force to make Iraq comply with the requirements of UNSCOM inspectors charged with dismantling Baghdad's prohibited arms.

For the first time in nearly seven years of UNSCOM's work they also included outside experts, drafted in to address Iraqi complaints that UNSCOM is a hostile body committed to prolonging its work and extend sanctions on Iraq.

UNSCOM's 18-strong team includes six experts brought in from Russia, the United States, France, Germany, Britain and China.

A team of chemical experts were due to arrive later on Sunday for talks on the deadly nerve agent VX. Talks on Iraq's biological programme, where UNSCOM says it has made the least progress, are due later this month.

UNSCOM Chairman Richard Butler has already said he doubts the talks will lead to any positive breakthrough.

Iraq has not accounted for 45 warheads, although UNSCOM believes some of them have been destroyed. It has also been unable to account for ingredients or precursors, that could produce tonnes of VX gas, saying they were dumped in the desert.

Its biological programme is "the worst of the lot," according to Mr. Butler.

Iraq hopes this month's "technical evaluation talks" will show it has cooperated with UNSCOM and clear the way for sanctions to be lifted.

"The [warheads] meeting will last for five days and a scientific and professional atmosphere will prevail in these meetings," said Hussein Muhammad Amin, head of Iraq's national monitoring directorate, which liaises with UNSCOM.

Mr. Amin said that Iraq did not possess any warheads and would "submit documents and material testimony to prove that" in the talks.

He did not say if Iraq would provide any new evidence.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said on Sunday that it could be "weeks" before the United States would be able to lift the sanctions.

"We will be examining Kofi Annan's suggestions specifically, but in a general way I can say that we do support an expansion of the oil-for-food programme," Ms. Albright told a news conference here.

Under a resolution covering the oil-for-food arrangement, Baghdad is allowed to sell oil worth \$2 billion every six months to buy food and medicine for the Iraqi population.

U.S. officials insist the increase is not meant as a "carrot" to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to persuade him to allow unconditional U.N. weapons inspections.

Of the \$5 billion in Mr. Annan's proposal, \$3.6 billion would be spent on humanitarian supplies for Iraq's 22 million people — a doubling of the current \$1.3 billion allocated for humanitarian needs.

The rest of the money would go to pay war reparations and fund U.N. activities such as the U.N. inspections of suspected weapons sites, according to diplomats.

Part of the increase would also be granted to Kuwait to pay for war reparations.

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Albright says King in good health

TEL AVIV (AFP) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright Sunday said King Hussein looked "terrific" when she met him this weekend in Britain. "I found him in very good spirits, looking terrific, relaxed," she said in a press conference following talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders concerning the peace process and the Iraq crisis.

Ms. Albright also praised the King's position on Iraq and on the need to force Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to stop fomenting U.N. arms inspectors hunting for suspected weapons of mass destruction. King Hussein "is a keen and astute observer of what's going on in the region. I appreciated his views and his understanding for the approach we are taking on Saddam Hussein," she said.

Palestinians, Israelis clash for third day in Bethlehem

BETHLEHEM (AFP) — Palestinians clashed with Israeli soldiers in the West Bank town of Bethlehem Sunday, the third day of violence following the death of a local teenager in Israeli police custody.

Around 100 youths threw stones at soldiers, who responded with tear gas and rubber-coated bullets near a Jewish religious site on the edge of the Bethlehem self-rule area, witnesses said.

Saturday two Palestinian policemen were lightly injured by Israeli rubber-coated bullets as they tried to hold some youths back from joining the protest, which broke up soon after. There were no reports of new injuries on Sunday.

The clashes began on Friday after the funeral of Nidal Zakaria Abu Suror, 18, who died Thursday in Jerusalem two weeks after being arrested by Israeli police on suspicion of car theft.

According to Israeli police, Abu Suror tried to hang himself the day after his arrest and died in a Jerusalem hospital on Thursday after 12 days in a coma.

An autopsy by Israeli doctors accompanied by a Palestinian official confirmed that Abu Suror died from neck injuries apparently suffered when he tried to hang himself.

Police offered no explanation for the suicide attempt, other than to say Abu Suror appeared to have been emotionally unstable.

But Palestinians held police responsible and claimed Abu Suror was killed during interrogation, a charge flatly denied by police.

Iran celebrates 19th anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's return

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran celebrated the anniversary of the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's return here from exile 19 years ago Sunday, heralding the monarchy's fall and the Islamic revolution's victory 10 days later.

The official ceremonies began, as they have every year, with the commemoration of the Shiite Muslim cleric's return after 15 years of exile in Iraq and his stay in the Parisian suburb of Neauphle-le-Chateau.

At 9:33 am on Feb. 1, 1979, an Air France plane landed at Tehran airport under tight security to welcome the 79-year-old ayatollah.

The religious leader, leaning on the arm of an Air France steward, descended from the aircraft, looking more at the steps on the gangway than at the crowd which had been waiting for him all night.

His return triggered demonstrations which lasted until Feb. 11. The "10 revolutionary days," known as "the 10 days of Dawn," preceded the fall of Shah Mohammad Reza

Pahlavi and ended 25 centuries of monarchy in Persia.

On the 19th anniversary of Khomeini's return Sunday, sirens wailed from public buildings, trains and boats, and school and church bells rang for a minute throughout the country.

Flowers were thrown Sunday morning from military helicopters flying from Tehran airport to the cemetery of Behesht-e-Zahra, south of the Tehran.

It was here that the ayatollah made a speech Feb. 1, 1979, just after his return, publicly challenging the legitimacy of royal power.

For the anniversary of the revolution, streets, squares, public buildings, schools and mosques were bedecked with posters, photos from 19 years ago and bright-coloured lights.

Iranian radio and television have been broadcasting "revolutionary days" speeches and ordinary citizens' recollections of the days when Tehran's streets were taken over by anti-imperial demonstrations.

This year, like every year since Khomeini's death in June 1989, his successor as the country's supreme guide, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, went early Sunday to pay his respects at the tomb of the Islamic Republic's founder.

He also visited the graves of senior officials who "fell as martyrs" during the revolution or the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

The official public festivities began Sunday morning at Khomeini's mausoleum next to the Behesht-e-Zahra cemetery before a large crowd.

Former Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani told the crowd that Ayatollah Khamenei "would firmly follow the path laid out by the religious leader."

Khomeini's "heritage should be preserved for future generations and especially for young people," said Mr. Rafsanjani, who was Iran's head of state from 1989-97.

On Saturday, Iran's moderate new president, Mohammad Khatami, and the members of his government visited the tomb and those of the

martyrs of the revolution to show their respect for the regime's basic principles, the official IRNA news agency said.

Mr. Khatami and cabinet officials "reiterated their pledges of allegiance to the sacred cause of the Imam Khomeini and the Islamic revolution," the agency said.

"Nineteen years after the revolution and after having successfully handled major upheavals, the great people of Iran are now in control of their destiny," said the Iranian president, who was elected in June.

As in previous years, the anniversary celebrations will include an international film festival, exhibitions of paintings, photography and books, sports competitions and concerts.

But for the first time, government cultural officials seem to want to allow more cultural freedom.

Film festival organisers said they invited American actor Anthony Quinn and other foreign film makers and actors.



After receiving the death sentence at an Egyptian military court, Taha Abdul Razek (wearing glasses) reacts with other convicted militants. The group of 65 militants received sentences by the court on Sunday. Mr. Abdul Razek and Gamal Abu Rawash were sentenced to death for plotting to assassinate top government officials and joining the outlawed Gama'a Islamiya, or Islamic Group, that has been fighting since 1992 to overthrow the government (AP photo)

Two militants sentenced to death in Egypt

HUCKSTEP (AFP) — Two members of the Islamist group Gama'a Islamiya were sentenced to death by a military court here Sunday for attempting to assassinate high-ranking Egyptian officials.

Gamal Mohammad Abu Rawash, 32, a doctor, and Taha Abdul Razek, a 21-year-old student at the University of Alexandria, were condemned to death by a military

court at this military base north of Cairo, the head of the tribunal said.

Rawash had also been charged with possession of two pistols and 800 rounds of ammunition.

The two were among a group of 65 suspected Islamists on trial here since Nov. 17, 1997. Most of them were arrested in 1993.

One of the defendants was

sentenced to life in prison with hard labour while 26 were sentenced to between three and 15 years in prison with hard labour.

Four of the defendants were sentenced to between one and 10 years in jail while 32 were acquitted.

They were accused of membership in the Gama'a, Egypt's main Islamist group, and providing assistance to

Rawash and Razek.

Khalaf Abdel Allam, a 30-year-old lawyer, was tried in absentia and sentenced to five years in prison with hard labour.

A total of 104 people have been sentenced to death by the military court since Islamists unleashed a wave of anti-government violence in 1992. Sixty-one of the death sentences have been carried out.

Algerian attacks kill 32 — newspapers

PARIS (R) — Thirty-two Algerians, including a three-year-old child and 16 Islamist rebels, were killed in Algeria by bombs, a roadblock attack and other violence, Algerian dailies said Sunday.

Some of the reports concerned violence in the middle of last week, before a two-day holiday break marking the end of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

More than 1,200 civilians were killed in massacres between Christmas and the end of Ramadan last Wednesday.

Attackers killed four villagers at Sidi Ali Cherif hamlet near Sig town, 300 km south of Algiers, on Wednesday, said La Tribune newspaper. Another woman was killed the same day in the same area at a fake roadblock and three people in the car with her were wounded.

Last October, about 50 bus

passengers were slaughtered near Sig at a fake checkpoint, according to Algerian reports.

Five people were killed on Wednesday when their truck ran over a bomb planted in the road in the Tenira area in Sidi Bel Abbes province, 380 km west of Algiers, said La Tribune.

The bodies of two shepherds and a three-year-old child were found on Wednesday, their throats cut, the paper said.

Government forces, pursuing an offensive against guerrillas, killed six rebels on Thursday in Boumerdes region, 40 km east of Algiers, said La Tribune.

In the southwestern region of Saïda, security forces shot dead 10 rebels as they tried to carry out a massacre in a village on Thursday, it said, without giving details.

The U.S. State Department in its annual human rights

report quoted estimates that a total of 70,000 people had died in the past six years of violence in Algeria.

The report, issued on Friday, said that while armed groups were increasingly massacring large groups of civilians, "questions have been raised about security forces' indifference to, or complicity in, civilian deaths."

A bomb on Saturday killed two people near Jijel town, 240 km east of Algiers, said Liberte newspaper. Jijel area is a stronghold of the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), the armed wing of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS).

Al Khabar said a leaflet circulating in the area from AIS leader Madani Mezrag insisted that his followers were keeping to a unilateral ceasefire he declared last October.

"He affirmed that his men were continuing to respect the

ceasefire he announced October 1 last year although some individuals attempted to breach it by perpetrating attacks in the AIS zone of influence," Al Khabar reported, quoting from the leaflet.

Al Khabar said "about 20" AIS rebels had broken away and were continuing to carry out attacks. It did not say whether AIS dissidents might be involved in some massacres, mainly in the western province of Relizane which was also widely seen as an AIS base.

The government blames Islamist guerrillas for the massacres but has not said which groups may be responsible.

The AIS and its rival Armed Islamic Group (GIA) are the main factions in a myriad of rebel groups. The AIS has blamed the GIA for the massacres.

Settlers building road to Israel — radio

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Jewish settlers have begun building a road linking their settlement in the northern West Bank to Israel, Israel Radio reported on Sunday.

Earthmovers rented by residents of Rehov have been cutting the route through fields in several Palestinian villages lying between the settlement and the Israeli frontier several kilometres away, the radio reported.

The road was being built without army approval but no action has been taken to stop the work, it said.

The radio quoted residents of Rehov as saying they want the road built ahead of an eventual army withdrawal from the region under peace accords with the Palestinians.

Iraqi civilians get their marching orders in mobilisation campaign

By Haro Chakmakjian
Agence France Presse

BAGHDAD — Hundreds of thousands of men and women in a volunteer army started a three-month training course on Sunday to help defend Iraq in case of U.S. attack, the official Iraqi News Agency (INA) said.

The courses, being organised in school yards and on playing fields around the country, got off to a calm and gunshot-free start in Baghdad.

A group of around 100 youths and older men assembled at a school in Al Karh district were drilled and shown by retired army officers how to assemble a machine-gun.

"My enemy, you'll find me in every house, alley and street," the marchers in civilian clothes shouted.

The trainees sang the national anthem as the Iraqi black-white-and-red flag was hoisted and then chanted, "With our soul, with our blood, we'll sacrifice for you, Saddam."

President Saddam Hussein called for the mobilisation of volunteers as Iraq marked the Jan. 17 anniversary of the start of the 1991 Gulf war.

Against the backdrop of U.S.

warnings of large scale military action to force Iraqi cooperation with U.N. weapons inspectors, the launch of training was held up until after 'Eid al Fitr, which follows the fasting month of Ramadan.

Men are to receive three hours of instruction a day, while women will get two hours. The first 10 days are to be devoted to marching, before the course moves on to weapons training, said INA.

The training programme forms "part of the preparations of the Iraqi people to confront U.S. aggression," it said.

At a girls' school in the upmarket district of Mansur, dozens of women aged between 15 and 65 lined up to add their names to the volunteers' list. Many of the girls wore headscarves, some had trendy platform shoes.

"I came to learn how to fight. Even if the Americans fire Tomahawk missiles from out at sea, I will still fight," said Khalida Mahmoud, a middle-aged woman clutching her handbag and dressed in her Sunday best.

"I may only be 15 but I can fight too," said local schoolgirl Heba Ahsan, standing in front of a blackboard on which "We don't want America" was scrawled shortly after the TV cameras

arrived.

A colleague, 17-year-old Thoraya Ibrahim, made an impassioned appeal for the world to block a U.S. attack and help lift economic sanctions.

"America has already harmed us in every way... Our children are not living like children. Do they see in America how our children are living here?" asked Thoraya, referring to the U.N. sanctions in force since the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

"How can the world allow America to attack us again?" she asked.

"I want to fight to save our children, our parents, our country. I will fight if they try to even take a single stone from our country," said Thoraya, voicing a patriotism shared by her friends.

She said she had heard of the sign-up campaign at school and on television.

Iraqi authorities expect a total of some one million people to sign up for the mobilisation, which many Iraqis see as aimed at boosting morale.

Each family is expected to come forward with one volunteer, while two are expected from larger households.

Islamists planned to kidnap observer — Israel

TEL AVIV (AP) — Islamists plotted to kidnap an international observer in the divided West Bank city of Hebron, an Israeli military prosecutor said Sunday.

The unarmed observers have been in Hebron since summer 1996, in an effort to reduce tension between the city's 130,000 Palestinian residents and about 500 Jewish settlers who also live there.

Most of the city has been handed over to the Palestinian National Authority, but the downtown settlers' enclaves are heavily guarded

by Israeli soldiers.

The four Islamists belong to the group Hamas, which is opposed to the peace agreement with Israel signed by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. More than 100 civilians have been killed in suicide bomb attacks carried out by Hamas in Israeli cities.

The four were indicted Sunday at the military court at Beit Al in the West Bank.

They are also accused of an unsuccessful attempt to kidnap an Israeli soldier and two unsuccessful attacks on soldiers in Hebron, one with

a firearm and one in which a bomb was thrown.

The military prosecutor, Captain Eli Bar-On, said the plot to kidnap an observer, to which the accused had confessed under interrogation, was a departure from past practice.

"Up till now the observers were taken there was a consensus [among Palestinian anti-Israel groups] that these people must not be touched," Capt. Bar-On told reporters.

The observers are mainly from Scandinavian countries, but other nationalities

are also represented.

The head of the cell, Hani Bader Sharif, told reporters he did not regret any of his actions. "I acted in the spirit of the holy war," he said.

The arrest of the four last month led to the uncovering of other Hamas cells by Israel and the Palestinian police. An undisclosed number of suspects were arrested by both forces, and the Palestinians raided a Hamas bomb factory in the West Bank city of Nabulus.

However, senior figures in the network are still at large, Capt. Bar-On said.

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PROGRAMME TWO

16:10 Peter Rabbit
16:30 French Cartoon Films
18:00 Riding High
18:30 Drama — Neighbours
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 French Documentary Programme
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Comedy — Hope and Gloria
20:00 Documentary — Perspective
20:30 American Chart Show
21:10 Drama — Burned Bridge
22:00 News in English
22:30 Emergency Room
23:15 Documentary — Cosmos

PRAYER TIMES

05:06 Fajr
06:25 (Sunrise) Duha
11:49 Dhuhr
14:48 Asr
17:13 Maghreb
18:33 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Swefeh. Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590

Church of the Annunciation

Tel. 637440
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Terre Sancta Church Tel. 622666
Anglican Church Tel. 652826
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751
Amman International Church Tel. 865897
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 688404
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932
Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295

English-speaking
Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Sunny to partly cloudy weather conditions will prevail with temperatures rising gradually and winds southeasterly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be sunny, winds

northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Min/Max. temp.

Amman.....02/14
Aqaba.....08/22
Deserts.....zero/15
Jordan Valley.....06/20

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 11, Aqaba 20 Humidity readings: Amman 42 per cent, Aqaba 42 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Walid Al Masri675485
Dr. Youssef Rashid875792
Dr. Jum'a Abu Dhlab758848
Dr. Khalil Jhali740740
Firas pharmacy661912
Ferdows pharmacy778336
Al Asema pharmacy637055
Nairook pharmacy623672
Al Salam pharmacy636730
Yacoub pharmacy644945
Shmeisani pharmacy637660
Najib pharmacy847632

IRBID:

Dr. Ahmad Qanu281484
Al Quds pharmacy(→)

ZARQA:

Dr. Walid Halaseh982799
Khalid pharmacy985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre.....637111
Civil Defence Department.....661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue.....636341
Civil Defence Emergency.....617101
Fire Brigade.....192.621111.637777
Rescue Police.....617101
Blood Bank.....775121
Highway Police.....843402
Traffic Police.....896390
Public Security Dept.....630321
Hotel Complaints.....605800
Price Complaints.....661176
Water & Sewerage Complaints.....897467
Amman Municipality Complaints.....787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance).....121
Overseas Calls.....010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs.....623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs.....661101
Jordan Television.....773111
Radio Jordan.....774111
Water Authority.....680100
J. Electricity Authority.....815615
Electric Power Co.....636381

RJ Flight Information

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Queen Alia Int. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Luzmila630195
Husein Medical Centre813813/32
Khalidi Maternity.....64281/6
Akileh Maternity.....642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity.....642362
Malhas, J. Amman.....636140
Palestine, Shmeisani.....607071
Shmeisani Hospital.....669131
University Hospital.....845845
Al-Muasher Hospital.....667227/9
The Islamic, Abdali.....666126/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali.....664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen.....777101/3
Al-Bashir.....775111/26
Army, Marka.....896111/15
Queen Alia Hospital.....602240/50
Amal Hospital.....674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery.....865199

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital09983323
Zarqa National Hospital09990560
Ibn Sina Hospital.....09986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital09990990

IRBID:

Princess Basma Hospital021275555

Greek Catholic Hospital

021272275

Ibn Al Nafees Hospital

021247100

AQABA:

Princess Haya Hospital (03134111)

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (08)53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 08 (52700).

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:15Sanaa (RJ)
08:25Damascus (RJ)
08:35Jeddah (RJ)
09:15New Delhi (RJ)
09:50Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:05Beirut (RJ)
16:20Cairo (RJ)
16:25London (RJ)
16:45 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
18:05Kuwait (RJ)
18:35Casablanca, Tunis (RJ)

Other Flights

04:15London (BA)
09:15Cairo (MS)
12:00Khartoum (SD)
13:25Bahrain (GF)
14:30Doha (QR)
15:05Vienna (OS)
16:00Dubai (EK)
18:00Istanbul (SD)
20:00Tel Aviv (LY)
21:10Paris, Damascus (AF)
22:30Athens (OA)
01:25Amsterdam (KL)

Royal Wings (RW)

06:05Tel Aviv (RW)
07:25Amman (QAIA) (RW)
07:15 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
09:50Aqaba (RW)
11:10Amman (QAIA) (RW)
12:00 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
21:20Aqaba (RW)
22:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:20Beirut (RJ)
10:10Frankfurt, London (RJ)
11:00Amsterdam, Chicago (RJ)

Other Flights

06:00Istanbul (TK)
08:25London (BA)
10:30Al-Arish (PF)
10:30Cairo (MS)
13:20Istanbul (SD)
14:15Bahrain (GF)
15:50Doha (QR)
15:50Vienna (OS)
17:00Damascus, Dubai (EK)
19:00Khartoum (SD)
21:20Tel Aviv (LY)
23:53Damascus, Paris (AF)
02:25Amsterdam (KL)
03:00Athens (OA)

Royal Wings (RW)

05:30 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
06:50Tel Aviv (RW)
07:55Amman (QAIA) (RW)
08:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
10:20Aqaba (RW)
11:40Amman (QAIA) (RW)
20:30Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:50Aqaba (RW)

JMA to respond to minister's scrapping of fee increases

By Odeh Odeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Jordan Medical Association (JMA) announced Sunday that it will hold a press conference within the next 48 hours to reply to a decision taken by Minister of Health and Medical Care Ashraf Kurdi to scrap a recent increase in fees by private general practitioners and specialists.

Dr. Kurdi previously said the ministry does not recognise the fees, introduced by the JMA towards the end of 1997, which raised the cost of an examination by a general practitioner from JD2-JD5 to JD3-JD5 and an examination by a specialist from JD5-JD7 to JD5-JD10.

In justifying his decision, Dr. Kurdi said the JMA did not take into consideration the prevailing difficult economic situation in the country and the public's inability to pay the hiked fees.

The minister formed a special committee group-



Ashraf Kurdi

ing former JMA presidents Zuhair Mulhas, Ishaq Maruqa, and Nabih Muammar and other specialists to advise him. The committee, which has already rejected the JMA's revised list of fees, is to submit its own recommendation to the minister.

Dr. Kurdi said he never approved of the JMA's increase in fees. He stated that the JMA would have to take doctors' qualifications and experience into consideration when hiking

fees, rather than increasing them across the board.

For his part, JMA President Bassem Dajani said the JMA is refraining from commenting on this development but will reply within 48 hours.

However, he said the question of setting doctors' fees was the prerogative of the JMA general assembly and board and not of the Ministry of Health and Medical Care.

In another development, health associations comprising doctors, pharmacists, dentists and nurses are currently considering taking action to counter Dr. Kurdi's formation of a special committee entrusted with introducing amendments to the existing associations laws.

The presidents of these associations have rejected the committee's mission, since it was formed without the associations' knowledge.

The three associations have scheduled a meeting this week to examine these developments.

Kingdom taking 'precautionary measures' in event of U.S.-Iraq confrontation — officials

By Francesca Ciriaci
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Jordan is taking "all necessary measures" to handle a possible exodus of tens of thousands of Iraqis and a disruption of oil supplies if the United States attacks Iraq, officials and diplomats said Sunday.

The measures are reminiscent of Jordanian moves during the 1990-91 Gulf war, when Amman had to cope with over one million refugees fleeing the region and find alternative sources for oil supplies, currently fully met by Baghdad.

"Precautionary measures have been taken to face a possible outcome," a senior official told the Jordan Times.

"We are not going to publish them now, nor will we tell the media about them. Let us wait and see," added the official, who requested anonymity.

Officials said the outlines of a relief "contingency plan" were discussed during a meeting late last week between Minister of Interior Nahir Rashid and representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other U.N. relief agencies based in Jordan.

Mr. Rashid, however, denied that a "contingency plan" had been ready to improve Jordan's limited capabilities to absorb

another wave of refugees.

But a source at the ICRC office in Amman told the Jordan Times that the "contingency plan" was the focus of Wednesday's broad meeting.

"We will act according to our mandate, but we cannot release details about the plan,"

Another delegate at the meeting said the government presented them with a "confidential contingency plan" and therefore, he could not disclose any details.

The ICRC and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) helped Jordan repatriate many of the over one million people who fled the region via the Kingdom after Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, sparking the Gulf crisis.

The ICRC, together with the Jordanian Red Crescent Society, set up two camps, Azraq and Azraq2, near the Jordanian border with Iraq, providing shelter and food supplies to 160,000 refugees. On average, they spent between two and seven nights before returning home.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also helped Jordan shelter and repatriate these third-country nationals fleeing Iraq and Kuwait, many of them poor workers from Sri Lanka, India and

Bangladesh.

Over 350,000 Jordanians living in Kuwait, many of them of Palestinian origin, were also forced to return to Amman because of the crisis, straining the country's limited infrastructure and services.

Jordan is still host to over 100,000 Iraqis, but only 35,000 of them have legal residence documents. They fled because of the crisis and ensuing economic hardships and political uncertainty.

In a worst case scenario, up to 400,000 people, mostly from Iraq, could seek refuge in Jordan and along border areas with Iraq if the U.S. launches a military strike against Iraq to solve the standoff with U.N. weapons inspectors, according to Arab newspapers.

Other relief officials said the size of the influx would depend on the duration and intensity of the military strikes.

Mr. Rashid denied media reports that Jordan was beefing up its military presence along the eastern border with Iraq to guard against any possibilities resulting from a military showdown.

"The soldiers currently at the [Jordanian-Iraqi] border have been stationed there for weeks and months to curb anti-smuggling operations," he told the

Jordan Times.

Ministry of Energy officials remained tight-lipped on their plans for alternative oil sources if Iraq is attacked.

Jordan relies on Iraq for its full requirement of 75,000 barrels of oil and derivatives a day under an annual protocol that secures half of the yearly \$550 million energy bill free of charge.

But the head of the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company, Abdul Wahab Zou'bi, told the Arabic daily Al Aswaq on Sunday that Jordan "could find itself in a difficult position if Iraq is attacked by the United States, as Iraq is our sole energy supplier."

He said Jordan had no agreement with Saudi Arabia to enable it to pump oil via the Tapline if Iraqi oil is stopped.

During the Gulf crisis, Riyadh cut off oil supplies, amounting to almost half of the Kingdom's daily needs, to avenge Jordan's perceived pro-Iraqi stand.

Saudi Arabia says Jordan owes it over \$100 million in fees and maintenance costs to run the pipeline.

"We do not even have any large tankers to ferry oil via the sea to Jordan," Mr. Zou'bi said in the interview.

According to official sources, Jordan's current strategic oil reserves are

enough for two weeks.

Amman had to seek some limited supplies from Yemen and from Syria during the 1991 Gulf War to compensate for a brief shortage in oil supplies from Iraq.

Officials could also not confirm press reports that Washington would be ready to cover the difference in cost if Jordan was forced to seek new supplies of oil from other countries such as Saudi Arabia at current market rates.

Many economists and officials believe Jordan's vulnerable economy could suffer severely if trade ties with Iraq were cut by a military strike.

Diplomatic efforts to defuse the crisis between Iraq and the U.N. over weapons inspectors intensified yesterday as Russia tried to reach a compromise that would head off threatened U.S. military strikes against Iraq.

Baghdad has refused to include "presidential sites" as part of the U.N. inspectors' mandate.

Crushing U.N. sanctions imposed on the Iraqis after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait cannot be lifted until the U.N. Special Commission certifies that Baghdad has no more weapons of mass destruction.

Jordanian, Egyptian national power grid linkage delayed due to technical problem

AMMAN (J.T.) — The linkage of the Egyptian and Jordanian national power grids, which was scheduled for last December, has been postponed until June due to a technical failure, according to Mohammed Arafah, director general of the Jordan National Electricity Company (JNEC).

In a statement published in the local press Sunday, Mr. Arafah said the connecting underwater cable under the Red Sea was broken by a collapse of a mass of coral reefs, thus necessitating the replace-

ment of a stretch of 600 metres.

The damaged stretch is part of a 13-kilometre-long, 400-kilovolt cable which cost around \$72 million, he added.

Complicated replacement procedures on the one hand and the depth of the sea bed on the other are the factors contributing to this long period of time to repair the cable, according to Mr. Arafah.

The Jordanian-Egyptian power linkage is part of a major project to link the grids of Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Turkey, a process expected to be

completed by the year 2002.

The linkage of the Jordanian and Syrian grids, the second stage of the scheme, is scheduled to take place during 1998, company sources said.

According to Mr. Arafah, special care is being taken to prevent similar accidents in the future by protecting the cable and making arrangements for its regular maintenance.

The project is being partially financed by the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development.

Airline announces increase in weekly flights to Tel Aviv

AMMAN (J.T.) — As of Feb. 15, Royal Wings, a subsidiary of Royal Jordanian (RJ), will operate seven flights per week between Amman and Tel Aviv, up from six at present, according to an announcement Sunday by Jasser Ziyad, director general of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

After his return from a visit to Israel at the head of an official delegation, Capt. Ziyad said El Al, the Israeli national airline, can now operate the same number of flights between the two destinations, up from their current five weekly flights on this route.

Capt. Ziyad noted that the

agreement was reached after two days of intensive talks with the concerned Israeli civil aviation officials.

Royal Wings, which last month added another 50-seat plane to its fleet, was hoping to raise the airline's flights to Tel Aviv to 10 per week and remove restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities on

flights between Haifa and Amman so that up to 450 passengers per week could be transported.

Royal Wings, which operates from Marka airport, also flies to other Middle Eastern destinations including Egypt and Cyprus.

In the two days of talks, the two sides also discussed

joint operation of the Peace Airport in Aqaba. Mr. Ziyad noted that officials from the two sides will hold a meeting tomorrow in Aqaba to assess the results of the trial joint operation of the airport and reach an agreement on the next stage.

The trial period started last November.

Cancer centre ends free examination programme

AMMAN (J.T.) — Al Amal Cancer Centre announced Sunday that the programme of free examinations for the public that started last November has ended.

The announcement said 500 citizens took advantage of the free examinations over the past three months, but now only subscribers who pay JD10 annually can request examinations.

The 120-bed centre, which started operations last April, charges an annual fee of JD10 per person for medical examinations, but those who require medical treatment or require laboratory or other tests pay 75 per cent of the cost, said a centre official.

The announcement said the centre was trying to raise public awareness on the need for regular medical examinations to give early warning of cancer, especially breast or prostate, to increase the chances for a cure.

Noting that the centre also

provides free advice and guidance to both men and women, the announcement said the centre has already provided medical treatment to 400 cancer patients from Jordan and other countries.

The regional facility, also a research centre, is equipped for highly advanced therapies such as bone marrow transplants and adult and paediatric chemotherapy.

It includes outpatient clinics and radio diagnostic, radio therapy and nuclear medicine departments and also gives advice on quitting smoking and healthy eating habits.

Al Amal Cancer Centre was created through contributions from Jordanian citizens and institutions. Organisations in the Netherlands and other countries also assisted in setting up and supplying equipment for the centre, considered to be the first comprehensive cancer research foundation in the region.

Red Crescent urges medical groups to discontinue use of emblem

AMMAN (J.T.) — The president of the Jordan National Red Crescent Society (JNRCS), Mohammad Hadid, has demanded that the Ministry of Health and Medical Care and other medical and pharmaceutical institutions in Jordan refrain from using the Red Crescent emblem, saying that it is for the exclusive use of the JNRCS.

In a recent interview published by the Arabic daily Al Dustour, Dr. Hadid said the Red Crescent emblem has been endorsed by international treaties and the Geneva conventions for the sole use of Red Crescent and Red Cross workers and their affiliated institutions.

There is a clear violation of these international agreements in Jordan, where the Ministry of Health and other organisations including hospitals have used the emblem for the past 20 years, according to Dr. Hadid, who is also president of the Higher Committee on Relief and Disasters in the International Federation of



Mohammad Hadid

Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

A law issued in 1969 provides for penalties, including imprisonment and fines, against those who use the crescent emblem in red, according to Dr. Hadid.

He added that the time has come to raise public awareness about the international humanitarian movement, whose emblem can only be

used in Jordan by the JNRCS in addition to the Jordan Armed Forces Royal Medical Services, who use the same emblem in the course of treating war victims.

Dr. Hadid said he has already discussed this issue with the Ministry of Health but received no favourable response. He warned that if there is no further response, he may have to resort to the judicial authorities.

Urging the Ministry of Health, hospitals, pharmacies and other organisations to use the crescent in green or other colours, Dr. Hadid said that in Europe, for instance, organisations use the green cross rather than the red cross.

He said that during the federation's annual conference in October in Geneva, this question will be discussed.

Dr. Hadid said two conferences held in Jordan in the past two years under the patronage of HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, called for respect of the Red Crescent emblem.

Jordan will not allow use of territory or airspace to attack Iraq — minister

(Continued from page 1)

looming U.S. military strike against it by giving in to United Nations Security Council demands for unrestricted access to search for weapons of mass destruction.

The Jordanian official said any strike on Iraq "will have a destructive impact on the Iraqi people and its shaky economic infrastructure."

"We call upon the United States to maintain self-restraint and not to resort to any military action against Iraq. At the same time we want Baghdad to abide fully with the U.N. resolutions and to allow U.N. inspectors to carry out their work without restrictions," he added. He was referring to the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) which carries the inspection work to eliminate Baghdad's mass destruction weapons.

The Jordanian official said Jordan was not involved in any "direct

effort to help end the tension between Iraq and the United Nations. He said Jordan "will wait and see the outcome of the Russian mediation efforts."

During his meeting with Mr. Posuvalyuk, Crown Prince Hassan stressed on Jordan's stand to resolve the deadlock over the inspection of presidential palaces in Iraq.

The Regent emphasised the need to "exhaust all diplomatic means to spare Iraq and the region any disaster that might result from any military escalation," the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

"Jordan will not spare any effort with all parties, as part of the collective diplomatic efforts, to contain the crisis," Petra quoted Prince Hassan as telling the Russian envoy, who is on the second visit to Baghdad this week.

Mr. Posuvalyuk stressed that his country will continue its efforts to reach a "diplomatic solution" through the

U.N. Security Council and the UNSCOM.

"Russia will continue its efforts to convince Iraq to cooperate fully with UNSCOM," Mr. Posuvalyuk was quoted as telling the Crown Prince before leaving for Baghdad.

Speaking on Russian Television, Mr. Posuvalyuk described his mission as "very tough."

The Iraqis "have already made a few proposals. Now the objective is to try to obtain a few more concessions," Agency France Presse quoted Mr. Posuvalyuk as telling the Russian television.

"Any attempt to create instability in Iraq will have negative impact on the whole region and create economic difficulty to the Kingdom," the minister said.

He emphasised that "Jordan's oil imports from [Iraq] will be affected and exports to Baghdad will be hampered if the United States carried out its threats to Iraq."

Albright announces new talks in Washington between Israel, PNA

(Continued from page 1)

position," the official said.

Under the proposal, Israel would conduct a troop withdrawal in steps, with each step "linked to Palestinian activity in fighting terror," the official said.

"Arafat told Albright that it is necessary to stick to the redeployments as written in the agreements and he rejected the division of the redeployment into parts," the official said.

On the scope of the withdrawal, the idea entailed the transfer of 10 per cent of the West Bank from partial to full Palestinian control and the

transfer of another 10 per cent from full Israeli to partial Palestinian control, he said.

Israel refuses to conduct the West Bank withdrawal unless the Palestinians meet a long list of pre-conditions, most concerning the fight against Islamists.

Self-rule agreements between Israel and the Palestinians call for a three-stage troop withdrawal in the West Bank.

The first stage, announced by Israel last March never took place. The third stage is due to take place later this year.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Tarawneh to brief committee on regional developments

AMMAN (Petra) — Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh today will receive members of the Arab and international affairs committee at the Lower House of Parliament. Dr. Tarawneh is scheduled to brief the concerned deputies about the latest developments in the Middle East.

Fire in Irbid sends 17 to hospitals

AMMAN (Petra) — The Civil Defence Department (CDD) on Sunday said 657 accidents were reported during the 'Eid Al Fitr. The report said 22 deaths resulted from these accidents. Meanwhile, CDD sources said a fire broke out in a restaurant on University Road in Irbid. Seventeen people rushed to Princess Badia and Princess

Parliament to hold session Wednesday

AMMAN (Petra) — The Lower House of Parliament will hold a session next Wednesday under the chairmanship of Speaker Sa'd Hayel Srour. The deputies will continue discussion of the customs draft law.

Tax department asks for income statements

AMMAN (Petra) — The Income Tax Department on Sunday called on all taxpayers to present a statement about last year's income before the end of February.

Rahma hospitals for smoke inhalation were reported to be in stable condition.

in Egypt

Rawash and Razek, Khalaf Abdel Alim, a year-old lawyer, was absent and withdrew from the court.

A total of 94 people been sentenced to military courts. The court sentenced a 20-year-old man to 10 years in prison for the same offence.

marching campaign

The campaign is part of a series of activities aimed at raising public awareness about the dangers of smoking.

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Senior U.N. official flies out to help seek kidnapped colleague

MOSCOW (AFP) — A senior U.N. official was expected in North Ossetia Sunday to help in the hunt for a U.N. refugee official kidnapped by gunmen in the tiny Russian republic four days ago, a spokesman for the agency said.

John Horekens, European operations director for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), flew out of Moscow early Sunday for the North Ossetian capital Vladikavkaz, the UNHCR press official said.

"Mr. Horekens is on his way to Vladikavkaz. He's going there to assist in the process of getting our colleague back," said the spokesman, who asked not to be identified.

"He arrived last night because of the importance of this whole affair and is going directly to Vladikavkaz," the spokesman said.

Frenchman Vincent Cochetel, 37, married and with two children, was abducted at gunpoint Thursday night from his Vladikavkaz home, the first U.N. official to be kidnapped in Russia.

Mr. Cochetel had been working for 16 months in North Ossetia, a small republic in Russia's turbulent Caucasus region.

The UNHCR spokesman said the length of Mr. Horekens' stay in North Ossetia would depend on the progress of the investigation by the Russian authorities, who he said were "making a lot of effort."

Vladimir Bezugly, the local head of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), said Mr. Cochetel had been kidnapped for mercenary, not political, reasons.

"Some Russian and international news agencies have

rushed to link the abduction of the French citizen Vincent Cochetel with the swearing in of the new president of North Ossetia (Alexander Dzasokhov), giving this incident a political character," he told ITAR-TASS.

"This version is not valid for the law enforcement agencies. Money is at the origin of this crime," he added.

The FSB and interior ministry had drawn up an initial list of suspects, Ria news agency quoted Mr. Bezugly as saying, adding that the kidnappers would be punished with the full force of the law.

The UNHCR official said the agency had "no contact in any shape or form" with the kidnappers.

It was premature to raise the prospect of a pullout from the region by the agency at this stage, he said. The UNHCR has six ex-

triate and 20 local staff in North Ossetia.

Kidnappings have been relatively rare in North Ossetia, despite a spate of kidnappings in Chechnya and the neighbouring Russian republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan.

Various Chechen criminal groups are believed to be holding several dozen hostages, including a number of foreign aid workers — five Poles, two Britons and two Hungarians.

Chechen First Deputy Interior Minister Vakha Zakriyev said Saturday that Grozny said it was ready to help in the search for Mr. Cochetel, but rejected speculation that Chechens may have been behind his abduction.

Chechnya was left awash with weapons after a 21-month war of independence against Russia, which left the separatist republic with de facto independence.

Sonia Gandhi says husband's killing not fully probed

AMETHI, India (AFP) — The Italian-born widow of slain Premier Rajiv Gandhi Sunday told an election rally in her husband's former constituency that the conspiracy behind his 1991 murder had not been fully revealed.

Sonia Gandhi, joined by her Britain-based son for the first time in her current election campaign, as well as her daughter and son-in-law, made the remarks to a crowd of more than 100,000 people here.

Referring to last week's death sentences handed out to 13 Indians and 13 Sri Lankans in connection with Gandhi's May 21, 1991, killing blamed on Sri Lankan Tamil rebels, she said: "The conspiracy behind the murder has still not been solved."

"There are some people in today's politics who made my husband's murder easy. There are some people who even today are embracing those who made the murder possible. I urge the government to fully probe the murder. This is a basic necessity."

Sonia Gandhi this month decided to campaign for the 112-year-old Congress, in decline after ruling India for around 40 years under such leaders as Rajiv, his mother Indira Gandhi and her father Jawaharlal Nehru.

Many Congress members want her to stand in the February-March elections and take over as party

leader, but she has refused such offers "for now."

The current elections are linked to Gandhi's murder as the Congress withdrew its key support to the outgoing minority coalition government over its refusal to drop a member party implicated in the killing.

Welcomed by thunderous applause and lusty cheers as she got off a helicopter to address the rally in a heavily-guarded ground, the 51-year-old widow paid an emotional tribute to Amethi, a family fiefdom.

"I have unflinching love and affection for the people of Amethi. My family shall always be grateful to you," she said.

"I am aware my decision not to fight elections from Amethi has disappointed you. I am also sad that I could not fulfil your hope but I took this decision after deep thought," she said in fluent Hindi.

"I decided that at the moment I need to work for the Congress all over the country. Please be considerate to me and continue to support me."

Sonia Gandhi made her first public speech three years ago in Amethi to denounce the government for the slow pace of investigations into Rajiv Gandhi's 1991 killing.

The district of Amethi, some 750 kilometres south-east of New Delhi is a rural constituency of about 1.2 million voters. Rajiv Gandhi was elected from

Amethi in four elections.

Sonia Gandhi flayed the dominant Hindu nationalists, who are widely tipped to top the upcoming polls but fall short of a clear majority, and recalled the role of their Hindu allies in the 1992 razing of a historic mosque which fuelled communal violence and left some 2,000 people dead.

"People will never accept those who pull down religious structures," she said to prolonged applause. "Only Congress can deliver the goods. Only Congress can give a government representative of all people."

"The coming elections are a big challenge ... on the one side are separatist tendencies ... on the other is India's future."

Jamuna Prasad Shukla, a former Congress legislator, said Satish Sharma, the Congress candidate in Amethi and a personal choice of Sonia Gandhi, would win easily.

"Satish will win not because the people of Amethi want him to represent them in parliament, but because voters here want to keep it for Sonia Gandhi."

"If the Congress were to get a majority in this election, Sonia Gandhi will be prime minister in which case Satish Sharma will have to resign from parliament to enable her to fight elections from here."

"The people of Amethi are eagerly looking forward to that day," he said.

Bomb threats force Japan flight to return to Jakarta

JAKARTA (AFP) — A Garuda Indonesia airlines flight to Japan returned to Jakarta's international airport Sunday after three bomb threats were received, officials said.

"Three times they called airport operations," Garuda airport Duty Manager Riaman told AFP.

"They said there was a bomb on the aeroplane," he said, adding the callers gave no indication of where the bomb had been placed and did not identify themselves.

"The flight had to come back to be checked." Three of the 210 passengers on board suffered minor sprains and bruising when they slid down emergency slides on landing, he added. Thirty crew were also on the flight.

A police search of the Airbus-330 uncovered nothing, Mr. Riaman said.

Flight GA-782 left Jakarta for Kansai airport, near Osaka, at 00.40 a.m. (1740 GMT) and landed again about one hour later.

An officer at Jakarta's police headquarters, who identified himself only as Mulyadi, confirmed police had searched the plane but declined to give details.

The passengers were transferred to nearby hotels pending their departure on the same aircraft, scheduled for 8:00 p.m. (1300 GMT).



A former Thai journalist (left), who had been laid off from a leading Thai business newspaper, sketches a picture for a client during a fair called 'reporter to seller' for former journalists (AFP photo)

Jobless Thai journalists join ranks of street vendors

BANGKOK (AFP) — Jobless Thai reporters launched their own street market Sunday, proving the pen is not mightier than the battered baht.

Journalism has become the latest profession — following stockbrokers and finance workers — to be hit with mass layoffs as a result of Thailand's crashing economy.

So ex-reporters have put down their pens and grabbed whatever they could find to sell. They are selling goods at the "former journalists market" at Mah Boonkrong, central Bangkok.

About 212 former reporters — a fraction of the 3,000 media workers laid off since Thailand's economy hit the rocks last July — registered to run stalls at the one-off market from Friday to today.

Chailai Reungrungrong,

32, who just lost her job with Siam Post, told AFP she was shocked to find herself unexpectedly out of work.

Siam Post is one of more than 10 Thai-language newspapers to fold in recent months.

"I felt really, really shocked," Ms. Chailai said. "One day I was reporting stories but the next day I found that I had no newspaper to work for."

Ms. Chailai, who sells clothes at the market, said business was slow but she was happy at least to be working again.

"Lots of people just come to look but I suppose this is better than having nothing to do," she said. "But if I had the chance I'd rather be working as a journalist."

Another former reporter said that even though journalists worked for the public interest no one seemed to care when they lost their

jobs. "We always do our job — we reported when finance workers lost their jobs — but when it came to us no one cares, not even other journalists," he said.

Products on offer at the journalists' market included clothes, videos, fruit and souvenirs.

Many politicians — in a move which came as a great surprise to the journalists-turned-vendors at the market — gave generous support to their old foes in their new enterprise.

Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai donated one of his sketches for auction, while former premier and current opposition leader Chavalit Yongchaiyudh donated his golf clubs.

The government estimates up to two million Thais will be out of work by the end of this year, from about 1.3 million now.

Over 300 prisoners freed in Afghan holiday amnesty

KABUL (AFP) — More than 300 prisoners held by Afghanistan's rival warring factions were freed as part of an Eid Al Fitr holiday amnesty, a spokesman for the Red Cross announced Sunday.

"Before the Eid holiday the Taliban freed 112 from Kabul and 75 from Kandahar," said International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) spokesman Juan Martinez.

"From the side of the northern alliance, 36 were freed from Mazar-i-Sharif and 85 from the Panjshir," Mr. Martinez added.

Mr. Martinez said the releases from opposition-held northern Afghanistan were conducted in the presence of the ICRC, while the Taliban releases had yet to be fully confirmed.

However, he said, the releases and the participation of both sides in the amnesty — held to mark the end of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan — was a "good sign."

He said "308 released out of more than 5,000 held in prisons in Afghanistan is not perfect, but it is a good thing."

The issue of prisoners has been a contentious one between Afghanistan's factions, but recent months have seen a spate of unconditional releases raising hopes for possible talks between the sides.

The Taliban militia control around two thirds of Afghanistan including the capital Kabul, and have imposed what they say is the world's purest Islamic state.

The hardline movement is opposed by a coalition made up of ex-Communist General Abdul Rashid Dostam, the ousted Kabul government led by toppled Ahmad Shah Masood entrenched in the northeastern Panjshir valley and Hezbi-Wahdat, a Shiite Muslim militia.

Cambodian dissident withdraws party from electoral process

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — Cambodia's leading dissident, Sam Rainsy, Sunday withdrew his opposition Khmer Nation Party (KNP) from the country's electoral process, calling it "perverted" and designed to ensure a victory for strongman Hun Sen.

The move deals another blow to hopes that July's scheduled polls will be all-inclusive as two other parties have rejected the composition of the country's national electoral commission as unfair and biased.

Sam Rainsy, complaining about an interior ministry decision to register a renegade group of former KNP members as an official party with the same name and logo as his, urged other members of Cambodia's opposition to withdraw from the electoral process.

"The current Phnom Penh government led by (Second Prime Minister) Hun Sen is using tricky and unlawful methods to undermine the KNP's chances of winning the forthcoming elections

scheduled for July 26," the dissident said in a statement.

"The KNP protests the interior ministry's irresponsible decision to register two political parties bearing the same name and logo knowing the group that unlawfully calls itself KNP ... has no right whatsoever to use that party's name and logo," he said.

Wednesday, local newspapers reported that the interior ministry had created a preliminary list of more than 40 political parties that had been registered for the polls. Both KNPs were included.

The rival KNP faction, led by Kong Momy, split from Sam Rainsy last year and has said it would cooperate with Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP).

Sam Rainsy said the dispute over the party's name and logo should be decided by a court to which he has already complained about the infringement.

But, he said, the court had ignored his suit while at the same time deciding a similar complaint in favor of a pro-Hun Sen faction of the divid-

ed Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP).

Like the KNP, the other BLDP faction is allied with deposed co-premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh who was effectively ousted by Hun Sen in July in fierce fighting in the capital.

"This Communist strategy results in a serious perversion of the electoral process allowing the CPP to surely win the next election with the prior eliminations of any genuine opposition," Sam Rainsy said.

"The KNP urges all its allies in the (opposition coalition) to withdraw en bloc from this perverted electoral process until serious corrective measures are taken to create a truly neutral political environment and to ensure the rule of law," he said.

Preparations for the upcoming polls are being closely scrutinized by the international community which has said it will not fund the election or recognise the results unless it is free and fair.

British MPs battle in apple-peeling contest

LONDON (AFP) — British opposition leader William Hague and Sports Minister Tony Banks, along with 76 other members of parliament, took out their knives Sunday to win the prize of "best apple-peeler" in a charity contest.

Organised to gather funds for the homeless, apple producers agreed to donate £10 (\$16) for each apple peeled by an MP, and £50 (\$80) for each fruit skillfully peeled in a continuous spiral.

The fastest apple peeler, whether Conservative or from the ruling Labour Party, will win the right to donate £100 (£160) to the charity and go home with a basket full of apples.

As the MPs peeled away, the restaurant of House of Commons prepared to make traditional apple crumbles for the city's homeless.

U.S. space shuttle lands safely in Florida

CAPE CANAVERAL (R) — The U.S. space shuttle Endeavour returned to earth Sunday, bringing home Astronaut Dave Wolf from his four-month sojourn on the Mir space station.

The flawless landing at the Kennedy Space Centre was set against a dusky sky, ending a 10-day mission that left another U.S. astronaut, Andy Thomas, aboard the Russian science outpost.

"Welcome home. Congratulations on a perfect mission," spacecraft communicator Susan Sill at mission control told the crew. "And Dave, welcome back from 128 days on orbit."

Wolf responded: "I wasn't counting. Is that how long it was?"

When technicians opened the hatch several minutes later, Wolf said: "I'm pretty excited about this. I can smell air from the earth."

Shuttle Commander Terry Wilcutt fired Endeavour's main engines for 3 1/2 minutes after an hour before the 5:35 P.M. EST (2235 GMT) landing. That slowed the shuttle so that its orbit degraded and Endeavour hit the earth's atmosphere at 25 times the speed of sound, beginning its steep descent to the runway.

After debarking the orbiter, Wolf was given a peppercorn and mushroom pizza ordered by NASA Administrator Dan Goldin and prepared by a NASA chef.

"I just wanted to say that Dave's peppercorn and mushroom pizza was delivered on time," Mr. Wilcutt reported after



Space shuttle Endeavour crew members Bonnie Dunbar and Russian Cosmonaut Salizhan Sharipov discuss the landing after the craft touched down at the Kennedy Space Centre. The shuttle returned from a rendezvous with the Russian Mir space station (Reuters photo)

inspecting the orbiter's tires and heat shields.

The seven-member crew was then taken to the operations and check-out facility for medical exams and initial debriefing.

Wolf, who is a physician as well as an astronaut, can expect a two- to six-week recovery before he is certified fit to return to duty.

While on Mir, Wolf rigorously adhered to a Russian exercise programme designed to counter the long-term effects of weightlessness. He had flirted with the idea of walking off the orbiter under his own power, but NASA scientists convinced him they could better study his reactions before and after his efforts to stand and walk.

In addition to the astronaut exchange, Endeavour's crew set a record by transferring more

than 408 kilograms of cargo between the space craft and space station. The seven astronauts spent their last morning in space deactivating various systems that were not needed during the landing and the shuttle's fiery reentry into earth's atmosphere.

Aboard Mir, Thomas and his crewmates, Anatoly Solovyov and Pavel Vinogradov, welcomed the Mir-25 crew of Commander Talgat Musabayev, flight engineer Nikolai Budarin and French researcher Leopold Eyharts. Their Soyuz capsule launched from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan Thursday.

The Soyuz used automatic pilot to dock with Mir Saturday. The six men will share Mir's cramped, cluttered quarters for three weeks, until Eyharts, Solovyov and Vinogradov

return to earth in their own Soyuz capsule on Feb. 19.

Musabayev and Budarin will spend six months on Mir, making further repairs to the station, which was badly damaged during a docking exercise last June. Thomas will spend four months, returning to earth aboard the last space shuttle scheduled to visit the 12-year-old Russian outpost.

Endeavour's Saturday landing would mark the 40th anniversary of the U.S. Space programme. On Jan. 31, 1958, a team of scientists and engineers successfully launched Explorer 1, the first U.S. satellite.

Endeavour will be returned to the orbital processing centre at the Kennedy Space Centre to prepare for its next launch this summer, the first U.S. mission in support of the international space station.

Over 300 Khmer Rouge prisoners freed in Afghan holiday amnesty

KABUL (AFP) — More than 300 prisoners of the Afghan Taliban were freed in a holiday amnesty announced Sunday. The Taliban, who took control of the country in 1996, announced the amnesty for the Afghan New Year holiday. The freed prisoners included 200 from the Taliban and 100 from the Islamic State of Afghanistan. The Taliban said the amnesty was a sign of their commitment to peace and reconciliation. The freed prisoners were released from various detention camps and prisons. The amnesty was announced by the Taliban's supreme leader, Mullah Omar. The freed prisoners were given the choice of returning to their homes or staying in the country. The amnesty was a significant development in the Afghan conflict, which has been ongoing since 1978. The Taliban's takeover in 1996 brought an end to the Soviet-backed communist regime. The conflict has since been a series of power struggles between the Taliban, the Islamic State of Afghanistan, and various international forces. The amnesty was a rare gesture of goodwill from the Taliban, who are known for their harsh and authoritarian rule. The freed prisoners were given the choice of returning to their homes or staying in the country. The amnesty was a significant development in the Afghan conflict, which has been ongoing since 1978. The Taliban's takeover in 1996 brought an end to the Soviet-backed communist regime. The conflict has since been a series of power struggles between the Taliban, the Islamic State of Afghanistan, and various international forces. The amnesty was a rare gesture of goodwill from the Taliban, who are known for their harsh and authoritarian rule.



A newly elected Bosnian Serb government led by Prime Minister Milorad Dodik (left, second row) are sworn in during a parliament session in northwestern town of Banja Luka (Reuters photo)

Moderate Bosnian Serb leaders fend off hardliners

BANJA LUKA, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AFP) — Moderate Bosnian Serb leaders loyal to Western-backed President Biljana Plavsic have secured their power, leaving ultranationalists loyal to Radovan Karadzic in the minority in ruling institutions of the Serb Republic. After Prime Minister Milorad Dodik's cabinet was sworn in Saturday, the parliamentary session voted to move the seat of government from Pale to Ms. Plavsic's fiefdom in this western Bosnian town. The assembly also voted to cancel 33 laws promulgated by the former legislature, which had continued to meet despite its dissolution by Ms. Plavsic last July. The laws concerned defence, the army and the interior ministry. The vote bolstered Ms. Plavsic and her allies, who have been embroiled in a power struggle since last year with supporters of Mr. Karadzic, the former Bosnian Serb leader and war crimes suspect. Western governments backed Ms. Plavsic and Mr. Dodik for their support of the 1995 Dayton peace accords ending 43 months of war in Bosnia. Leading Serb hardliner Aleksa Buha, head of Mr. Karadzic's Serb Democratic Party (SDS), said that his party and its allies in the Serb Radical Party (SRP) "had to become the opposition." The hardliners have refused to formally recognise the new government, appointed on Jan. 18 by the Bosnian Serb parliament after a walk-out by ultranationalist MPs. "We are still disputing the legality of this cabinet because it was elected on the basis of votes by the (Muslim-Croat) Federation deputies, whose mandates are also disputed by us," Mr. Buha told the Serb news agency SRNA. "Such political behaviour is inadmissible for the Republika Srpska (Bosnian Serb entity in Bosnia) national interest," he said. "The SDS and the SRP will be the opposition to this government, taking care of the RS national interest and defending the level of autonomy given to the RS by the Dayton accords," Mr. Buha said. The SDS suffered another blow when the deputies voted Saturday against discussion of a report from the assembly's legal commission, dominated by the hardliners, that concluded the appointment of the new cabinet was illegal. Moderates loyal to Ms. Plavsic appeared to have strengthened their control over Serb state institutions, especially since the transfer of power between the new and former officials had begun without anticipated difficulties. Mr. Dodik said Saturday that the final transfer of power from outgoing hardline premier Gojko Kljickovic was expected to take place Sunday. The ministries of defence, the interior and information have already changed hands, while the rest of the posts were expected to get new ministers soon. Speaking after the session Saturday, Mr. Dodik promised economic prosperity and democratisation for the Serb Republic. Congratulating the new cabinet, Hanns Schumacher, deputy to the top international official on Bosnia, Carlos Westendorp, said that the government could now go forward, turning its back on foot-dragging by hardliners. In two to three weeks, he said, the government could expect \$11 million from the European Union and other countries "to cover outstanding salaries and pensions which the outgoing government did not pay." Up to now, the RS has received less than three per cent of the international aid to Bosnia. "I expect a flow of around \$100 million in loans and credits," Mr. Dodik said. The new government has been trying to raise enough money to pay salaries to police, teachers, doctors and pensioners whose incomes were delayed for several months. The government has already dismissed 17 managers of state-run companies and the editor-in-chief of the state daily Glas Srpski. It announced that a new managing team would be appointed for state television to "develop a professional, responsible and independent network open to all sides."

Rights group says four poets arrested in southwest China

BEIJING (AFP) — Chinese police have arrested four liberal poets and confiscated their work as they were preparing to launch an unofficial review to boost literary freedoms, a human rights group said Sunday. The four were held Monday in Guiyang, the capital of the southwest Guizhou province, the Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said. The poets — Ma Zhe, 38, Wu Ruohai, 35, Xiong Jinren, 32, and Ma Qiang, 28 — were arrested after a search of their homes. During the raid, police took away address books and copies of their work, the Hong Kong based group said. Authorities in Guiyang refused Sunday to comment on the report, and the families of the four poets had received no explanation for their detention nor how long they would be held. According to an associate of the poets, quoted by the Information Centre, the four were known in literary circles for their liberal views and their bid to find ways to allow "their work to flourish outside the control of the official ideology." They were arrested as they prepared to launch the review "aimed at speeding up the revival of the cultural movement in China, and increasing literary freedom," the Information Centre said. The most famous of the four, Ma Zhe, whose real name is Xue Deyun, spent more than three years in prison after taking part in student protests of December 1986 in Beijing. Frank Lu, spokesman for the Information Centre in Hong Kong, said China's Communist authorities had long kept tight control of the country's artists and writers. "Intellectuals have always had a hard time," he told AFP, recalling the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and '70s. "In some areas of China the situation is still very bad, it has not improved." "For the dissidents and the poets it's not any different, the Communist Party controls everything and they think this is counter-revolutionary and subversive." The group contacted the wife of one of the arrested poets late Saturday and were told all four were still being detained. "All they want to do is to publish one magazine to review Chinese culture," Mr. Lu said. News of the poets' arrest came shortly after the U.S. State Department released its annual report on human rights worldwide for 1997.

China says U.S. report on human rights distorts facts

BEIJING (AFP) — A U.S. State Department report on human rights in China "distorts facts" and interfered in its internal affairs, a Chinese government spokesman said Sunday. "The report distorts facts while pointing a finger at the Chinese government," the official Xinhua news agency said quoting foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao. "The U.S. government should respect facts and stop using human rights as an excuse to interfere in China's internal affairs," Mr. Zhu said. "China has always abided by the U.N. Human Rights Charter," he added. "The U.S. report released Friday said the Chinese government 'continued to commit widespread and well-documented human rights abuses ... (including) torture and mistreatment of prisoners, forced confessions, and arbitrary arrest and lengthy incommunicado detention,' besides repression in Tibet. But it added: 'The government's response to dissent was somewhat more tolerant than in recent years.'"

Sri Lanka mounts huge security operation for independence day

COLOMBO (AFP) — Security officials said the main venue for Wednesday's celebrations outside parliament, an exhibition centre and the main business district had been declared "high-security zones" with parking banned. Near the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, venue of a major exhibition on Sri Lankan life, a bulldozer built a concrete and earth roadblock. At the approaches to parliament, some 30 khaki-clad police and troops armed with AK-47 rifles stopped and carefully searched every vehicle, even including one carrying plain-clothes police officials. A police spokesman said around 5,000 police would be on security duty in the city plus an unknown number of soldiers and airmen. Some 10,000 police and troops had been due to guard Kandy, planned as the main venue for events until the bombing wrecked the country's holiest Buddhist shrine, the Temple of the Tooth. But authorities switched the main venue to Colombo, although it has been the target of numerous deadly suicide bombings during a drawn-out war waged by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for a Tamil homeland in the north and east. A Sri Lankan government spokesman said Prince Charles was due here Tuesday afternoon on the first leg of a tour which will also take him to Nepal and the remote mountain kingdom of Bhutan. British security personnel have arrived in Colombo to assess sites which Britain's heir to the throne will visit. Apart from the potential threat from the Tigers, anti-British demonstrations have not been ruled out. Britain has been accused by Buddhist groups of partial responsibility for the temple bombing by allowing the LTTE to maintain offices in London and carry out fundraising. Some Buddhist leaders have called for a boycott of Prince Charles's visit. Sri Lanka gained independence on Feb. 4, 1948, following Britain's withdrawal from India the previous year. Some commentators have used the anniversary to examine the mistakes of the past half-century, during which the country has grappled with a leftwing revolt which claimed 17,000 lives as well as the war with the Tigers. Some 55,000 people have been killed in the separatist conflict, which began around 1972 and intensified in 1983. It swallows a third of the annual budget. "Ceylon when it emerged into independence was a country which had everything going for her," said an editorial in the government-run Sunday Observer, citing a healthy economy, robust political institutions and a high literacy rate. Asking "What then went wrong," the paper pinpointed the failure to bring all communities together "on a basis of honour and mutual respect." And it said political institutions must be recreated to draw marginalised groups into the mainstream. "On the basis of the effort to tackle those twin problems will hinge the next 50 years of Sri Lanka's future."

Lloyd Webber sells London mansion

LONDON (R) — British composer Andrew Lloyd Webber has sold his London mansion to a Czech financier with a taste for the high life. Viktor Kozeny, 34, who hit the headlines last month when he splashed out £13,000 (\$21,300) for a dinner at a London restaurant, has paid £12.5 million for the luxurious property in London's plush Eaton Square, the Sunday Telegraph newspaper reported. Mr. Kozeny's restaurant bill at La Gavroche included a bottle of 1961 Chateau Latour. He sent back a £5,000 bottle of La Romanee Conti burgundy because it was "too young." For Lloyd Webber, the 48-year-old composer of musicals such as "Cats" and "The Phantom of the Opera", the sale ends a year-long search for a buyer for the six-storey house he bought for £10.5 million in 1990.

Clinton lied about sex affair but still doing a good job — poll

WASHINGTON (AFP) — President Bill Clinton lied about an alleged sexual affair with a former White House aide, but is nevertheless doing a good job, according to respondents in a Washington Post poll released Sunday. The daily's latest poll showed that 67 per cent of those surveyed approved of the president's job performance, and 55 per cent said he has the honesty and integrity to serve as president. But 53 per cent — a slight drop from 57 per cent in a similar survey a week ago — believe that Mr. Clinton is lying when he denies having an affair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky, 24. Mr. Clinton faces allegations that he had an affair with Ms. Lewinsky, then lied about it under oath. He then presumably urged her — or had a friend press her — to lie about it in a sworn statement. Suborning perjury is an impeachable offence. Just 40 per cent of those surveyed said that Mr. Clinton should be impeached if he lied under oath about the affair and did not resign, down from 55 per cent a week ago. And 59 per cent of those polled by the daily agreed with a statement closely resembling first lady Hillary Clinton's contention Tuesday that a "right-wing conspiracy" was trying to topple her husband. Special prosecutor Kenneth Starr — who has spent more than a quarter of a million dollars over more than three years probing alleged wrongdoings by the Clintons — is more intent on bringing down the president than unearthing the truth, according to 60 per cent of those polled.

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An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation. Established 1975.
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Web Sites: http://accessme.com/JordanTimes/

The Jordan Times is published daily except Fridays. Subscription and advertising rates are available from the Jordan Times advertising department.

Fuel on the fire

DESPITE THE ongoing Gulf crisis and the increasing prospects of it escalating into an armed conflict, the price of crude oil is still dropping and now stands at about \$16 a barrel. Most countries have been scaling down the price of fuel and its derivatives to the public except Jordan, where the opposite is the case. Although we receive oil from Iraq at a cost far below the international market price, we are being charged steadily increasing prices all the time. Effective as yesterday, and succumbing to pressure from retailers, the government has introduced new price for fuel oil and gas.

There is no quarrel about the need to give a share of profit to the middlemen in this trade but not at the expense of consumers, especially the poor. To begin with, the base price of fuel and gas should have gone down instead of up because of the dictates of the international market. We cannot understand why at this time, while the country is still under the grip of cold weather, the government saw fit to increase heating and transport costs. The government is expected to show more sensitivity to the economic hardships being faced by many Jordanians. With unemployment being still too high and minimum wage too low, the last thing that the government should be thinking of is increasing the cost of living, especially in essential commodities and services.

This issue brings to the forefront once again the growing discrepancy between the way the government paints the overall economic condition in the country and the reality being experienced by most Jordanians. Despite the rosy picture painted by macroeconomic figures, many people find it difficult to make ends meet. Whether unemployment is 15 per cent as the government insists or about 22 per cent as some independent sources claim, the country has a serious problem that casts a shadow over the government's optimistic assessments. Coupled with the very low minimum wage and creeping poverty line, the unemployment issue is clearly more serious than the authorities care to admit. This is no time, therefore, to increase the cost of living in the country, especially with regard to the basics such as heating and public transportation.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Tareq Masarweh noted that President Clinton's State of the Union Address was void of any reference to the Middle East crisis but was explicit with threats of war directed against Iraq. The president's address was clear to all, including the Arab states, but not a single Arab country has thus far accused the U.S. administration of retreating from its pledges to achieve a lasting settlement to the Middle East question, said the writer. He said neither has any Arab state raised a protest against Washington's threats of war against Iraq. It is no secret that certain wealthy Arab states are financing the massing of American and other forces in the Gulf to launch a new aggression on Iraq in which new types of weapons are expected to be used, said the writer. The U.S. is accusing Iraq of hiding weapons of mass destruction, but the U.N. inspection teams have for the past seven years searched and destroyed these weapons, said the writer adding that the Americans are planning to carry out a devastating war not only against Saddam Hussein and the military installations but against the Iraqi people and the residential areas in Baghdad and other cities.

Al Arab Al Yawm's Nicola Nasser described the armed Jewish settlers in Palestine as constituting a formidable force which would destroy any hope for peace. The writer said that while Israel maintains this force which is armed to the teeth on Arab lands, it claims to the world that the settlers require protection because they are located in the midst of hostile Arab towns and villages and therefore Israel must maintain its control over all the Arab lands to provide such protection. Nasser recalled that the U.N. General Assembly last November passed a resolution calling for an end to Jewish settlement construction in Palestine and requested Switzerland to organise an international conference based on the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention to discuss the question of armed settlers in Palestine. But he said the U.S.-Israeli alliance is certain to nip such a conference in the bud and prevent any international parley on the Jewish settlers' danger posed to the Middle East region. He said the armed settlers living on Palestinian lands constitute a time bomb set to explode at any moment.

Economic Review

Tourism sector in need of elbow grease

By Dr. Yusuf Mansur

A QUICK analysis of last year's investment figures demonstrates where Jordan's bread and butter come from: Tourism, which drew \$760 million in revenues last year with an increase of 4.6 per cent over the revenues of 1996, is the second most important sector after mining and manufacturing. Given the significance it rightfully deserves, tourism is a competitive cluster that should be carefully considered.

According to the valuable and timely research on the competitiveness of this sector conducted by Nesreen Barakat, in order to improve the level of revenues generated it is very important that the issue of local demand be fully addressed. Among Barakat's findings, local demand was determined as lacking in sophistication, which would make any attempt to increase the competitiveness of the sector a difficult undertaking.

Tourism flourishes in large economies where the local demand is sophisticated. The size of the Jordanian local market is small because of a relatively small population size and a low-income level per capita. These affect tourism in two main respects. First, items that are required for providing deluxe services have to be imported because of the inability of the economy to provide them, which would reduce the economic benefit of the dollars spent on tourism (tourism multiplier) since the money that is spent by tourists is re-exported or leaked out in the form of imports. Second, since the local economy is small, the local demand for tourism products must necessarily be small. And

because the market size cannot be expanded in terms of numbers (at least in the short-run), the level of spending by Jordanians must be addressed with a view to increasing it to create a larger market. In other words, Jordanian consumers should become an important element in tourism marketing plans, travel vouchers, trip catalogues, costs and infrastructure; better still they should be made aware through clever marketing campaigns of what a pleasure it is to visit Jordan.

At the micro level, products must be tailored to suit Jordanian tastes without forsaking the international consumer; and a domestic preference for existing tourism products (sites, artefacts, paraphernalia, etc.) must be cultivated. Countries that do have a thriving tourism industry are also ones where the domestic consumer frequents these tourism spots and enjoys them. Therefore, Jordanian consumers must demand and consume quality tourism products in order to justify the existence of a large industry. Otherwise, Jordanian tourism will continue to be a business that is exposed to regional fluctuations that are beyond the control of the local planner.

Shopkeepers, hotel owners and travel agents have to be able to tap the local market first for tourism. At the same time, a modern infrastructure has to be established to attract this demand with micro level marketing that focuses on attracting segments of the sector without harming the potential to attract the rest of the world.

Put in simpler and practical terms, there are a host of procedures and

issues that should be addressed. For example, the cities of Aqaba and Petra need more restaurants that provide traditional Jordanian meals at prices that are affordable to the average Jordanian visitor instead of the present array of restaurants whose prices are either too high and therefore compete with hotels, or too low and compete only for the taste of the low-income guest-worker or poorer segment of the population. In addition, local businesses or authorities must provide or help provide signs and booklets that inform people about where to go and how and when to spend their money. In the absence of an updated telephone directory and in light of the present changes in telephone numbers, which render old telephone numbers useless, this is extremely important. Through no fault of their own, tourism operators are being cheated of the possibility of getting the tourist to spend his/her money in their place. (The money that is lost in failed economic transactions due to the failure of the information structure, including the lack of a modern and up-to-date telephone directory, far exceeds any outlays that the availability of these services would require.)

Tourism, like other sectors in Jordan enjoys big plans and broad-brush designs. What it needs is small changes at every juncture and fine detail. Effort and true expertise have to be expended not only at the peak of the tourism hierarchy but also at the grass-root. Unfortunately, big plans that are not coupled with micro changes share a common characteristic: they do not work.

M. KAHIL



Former U.S. official appeals for justice for Iraq

AMMAN (J.T.) — Following is former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark's Jan. 28 letter to the U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan about the current U.S. threats against Iraq. The text of the letter, signed by Mr. Clark as chairperson of the New York-based International Action Center, was made available to the Jordan Times.

THE UNITED STATES government has climaxed months of propaganda and threats against Iraq with the statement it will launch a new sustained attack using missiles and bombs on suspected biological and chemical weapon sites and other targets, alone if necessary, as soon as mid-February. It offers as its excuse Iraq's failure to permit its inspectors unrestricted access to any place in Iraq they choose.

For the Security Council to permit the United States to take the enforcement of Security Council resolutions into its own hands and commit acts of war against Iraq would have tragic consequences for the United Nations and the hope for peace.

There is no chance that such an assault would not kill innocent civilians. While then-U.S. Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger proclaimed it "was impossible" that civilians were killed by surprise U.S. air strikes against the sleeping Libyan cities of Tripoli and Benghazi in April 1986, we now know hundreds of civilians were killed. It is impossible to bomb cities without

killing civilians.

In the last three days of his presidency January 17-19, 1993, George Bush ordered hundreds of cruise missiles and air strikes to be launched against Iraq causing scores of civilian deaths. One cruise missile struck the Al Rashid Hotel killing two hotel service employees. U.S. intelligence agencies believed Saddam Hussein was to attend an international Islamic meeting in the Al Rashid at the time.

When President Clinton ordered 23 cruise missiles to be launched toward Baghdad on June 26, 1993, justifying his acts by citing the right to self-defence under Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, they managed to kill dozens of civilians including Layla Al-Altar, artist and director general of Iraq's National Centre for Arts, and her husband when a missile hit their home.

The United States has made a shooting gallery of the "Cradle of Civilisation." People live there. Their lives are threatened and some are lost every time the U.S. decides, for its own political interests, to attack. When the Security Council authorises, or condones, such attacks, it, too, is guilty of crimes against humanity.

Attacks against nuclear, biological, or chemical plants and other inherently dangerous facilities violate international law because they expose civilian populations to death and injury. The General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution on Dec. 4, 1990, specifically prohibiting any

attacks on Iraq's two nuclear facilities. The U.S. ignored the resolution. On Jan. 23, 1991, General Colin Powell announced Iraq's "two operating reactors...are both gone. They're down. They're finished." On Jan. 30, General Norman Schwarzkopf boasted his forces had attacked 18 chemical, 10 biological and three nuclear plants. By Feb. 4, 1991, a French military spokesperson was reported to say the chemical fallout was being detected throughout Iraq. See, e.g., Financial Times (London) Feb. 4, 1991; Medical Educational Trust Report, Background Papers, July 1991, p. 15. U.S. forces fired more than 900 tonnes of depleted uranium in missiles and shells into Iraq leaving unretrievable, deadly radioactive matter in the soil and water forever. The U.S. showed no concern for the civilian population of Iraq. It cannot be expected to show more now.

The Security Council and the General Assembly should immediately admonish the United States that it must not commit any armed assault, or other grave threats to peace, against Iraq. It should condemn the repeated uses of false propaganda employed to create fear and hatred toward Iraq such as the recent false claims that photographs proved Iraq tested chemical weapons against prisoners.

The Security Council should announce that after seven years no credible evidence has been found that Iraq is manufacturing or possesses new nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons,

and that Iraq has the same rights accorded to every nation to refuse inspectors that it deems a threat to its national security. See, e.g. Chemical Weapons Convention Implementation Act of 1997. How else could Iraq consider inspections of the residences of its president and high officials by U.S. military officers who served in U.S. intelligence capacities during the 1991 bombing of Iraq?

Above all, the Security Council must act now to end the sanctions against Iraq.

They are the direct cause of the deaths of a million and a half people, the majority infants, children, chronically ill persons and the elderly. They are genocide as defined by the Convention Against Genocide, and take several hundred more lives each day. There can be no link between these sanctions which afflict the weakest members of society and any acts of the government of Iraq.

International law prohibits the use of starvation as a weapon even in times of war.

In this moment of crisis, the Security Council and the General Assembly must renounce all sanctions which impact on an entire society, killing and injuring its most vulnerable members. They must prohibit the use of punitive missile and air strikes by one nation against another and specifically a superpower against a defenseless people.

Human Rights File

Butler's bias is exposed

By Waleed M. Sadi

ALL OF a sudden Richard Butler, the head of the U.N. weapons inspections team in Iraq, was quoted as saying by the New York Times that Iraq has enough missile-driven biological weapons to devastate Tel Aviv. Mr. Butler also said, according to the newspaper, that Baghdad possesses biological bombs containing "anthrax and botulin" that "could blow away" the Israeli city. Since then Mr. Butler retracted from this position and accused the New York Times of misquoting him or quoting him out of context. But the damage was already done. The daily journal in question is no ordinary newspaper and enjoys a very high standard of journalism. This fact would give the New York Times rather than Mr. Butler the benefit of the doubt about the veracity of his statements.

The way, then, that the head of the weapons inspection team in Iraq is making his case against Iraq suggests that the ultimate objective of his inspection team is to save Israel from any Iraqi threat — period. There is no apparent concern for other countries in the area. This obsession with the security of Israel at the expense of all other considerations including the security of other cities in the Middle East makes the goals of the international inspection team under its current leader lopsided or rather one-track-minded. By so stating his case against Iraq, Mr. Butler has eroded his credibility as a fair-minded international servant and should therefore be replaced.

There will come a time when increasingly more Middle Eastern countries will acquire weapons of mass destruction, one way or another. Unless lasting and comprehensive peace can reign in this region of the world and soon, the proliferation of such weapons, whether they are of poor country or rich country vintage, is bound to take place during the foreseeable decades. Even though Iraq poses a special case in this context for having deployed chemical weapons in the past, the manufacture, possession and deployment of weapons of mass destruction by one country in the Middle East and the Gulf region cannot be dealt with in an effective way for long in isolation from the broader perspective engulfing the entire area.

If in fact, as Mr. Butler was quoted as saying, the team of inspectors have evidence that Iraq not only possesses these terrible weapons but has already placed them on missiles ready for redeployment, then the U.N. Security Council in general and the U.S. and U.K. in particular should cool the situation rather than heat it up. If Washington and London are bent on going it alone and make a series of aerial strikes against Iraq, what is going to prevent the Iraqi government from retaliating against the very Israeli city or cities that they would like to defend. For sure Iraq's means of delivery are primitive and could be easy targets for U.S., British and Israeli defence weapons, but all it takes is one or two missiles to hit their target and the result would be horrifying.

In his State of the Union address Tuesday, President Bill Clinton stated, and correctly so, that Iraq had no hesitation to use weapons of mass destruction in the past. He vowed never to allow Baghdad to use them again. Of course the U.S. was the first nation ever to deploy nuclear weapons against another nation when it dropped atom bombs on two Japanese cities. True, World War II is far behind us, but the fact remains that the U.S. did not hesitate to use such weapons against another country and people. To that extent Washington had lost its high moral grounds and cannot lecture other nations against the use of such terrible weapons.

This is not to suggest that the international community may condone the manufacture, possession or deployment of weapons of mass destruction by Iraq. Far from it. If it could be established without a shadow of doubt that Baghdad did use chemical bombs against its own people in the past then it is obvious that such deployment constitutes a crime against humanity and reinforces the determination to rid Iraq of all such arsenals. Yet there is no escape from the conclusion that the legitimate quest for the destruction of all nuclear, chemical or biological weapons in Iraq should be pursued in parallel with the urgent quest for the destruction of similar weapons in all the countries of the Middle East. Washington's case against Iraq in this context can be strengthened considerably if it approached the Arab-Israeli peace process with equal zeal and thus lay the groundwork for declaring this region of the world a free of all kinds of weapons of mass destruction. Above all, as long as the conflict is in essence between Iraq and the international community, particularly the U.N. Security Council, neither Washington nor London should unilaterally or bilaterally take the law into their own hands and order a military strike against Baghdad without first extracting from the council a resolution to that effect. Should both countries proceed without the council's approval, they run the risk of being accused as having their own distinct agenda in this growing dispute. President Clinton has repeatedly assured the world that the standoff with Iraq is global. If this is the case, why not then wait for a Security Council action before attacking Iraq? The ongoing tug-of-war with Iraq has been with us for some months already and there is no pressing reason to act now before diplomacy is given a new lease on life. Baghdad has a record of escalating the situation only to back off at the last minute. There is every reason to believe that the Iraqi regime would do the same this time and seek a peaceful solution at the last minute. Besides, the consequences of the existing standoff are not so irreversible that they cannot be rectified in due course. What is of prime concern is the welfare of the Iraqi people who have suffered so much already.

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Rights File
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Papyrus scrolls excavated at Petra shed new light on several dimensions of life in the 6th Century

This is the final article of a three-part series on the analysis of the papyrus scrolls that were discovered in 1993 among the remains of a 6th Century Byzantine church in Petra.

By Rami G. Khouri
Special to the Jordan Times

ONE OF the large papyrus scrolls excavated at Petra, roll 83 named Papyrus Petra HM King Hussein bin Talal and HM Queen Noor al-Hussein, has been studied by the Finnish papyrologists Drs. Maarit and Jorma Kaimio. It contained approximately 700 lines of text on the settlement of several disputes between two known men, and reveals interesting aspects of conflict-resolution and the adjudication of legal disputes in the Byzantine period in south Jordan.

The two men involved in the dispute, known from other Petra papyri, were Theodoros, son of Obodianos, and Stephanos, son of Leontios. The disputed properties were not in Petra, but in the nearby town of Zadakathon (modern Sadaqa); the agreement was confirmed with oaths exchanged in the Chapel of the Martyr Kyrikos situated in the same town.

Theodoros and Stephanos owned houses which were adjacent to each other, which caused some disputes between them, especially when Stephanos began to build a water-channel to his home from a spring owned by the neighbour. The dispute was not resolved in court, but rather by an arbitration hearing before two trusted men. Among the disputed issues were: the right to draw water from the spring, to build water-channels and use drains, and to have access through the houses, along with mutual accusations of stealing building materials and not paying an old debt related to the sale of a vineyard; some of the contentious events had been undertaken by the respective fathers of the litigants, as far back as 53 years previous to the date of the scroll. After the decisions of the arbitrators were given, the two parties settled their disputes with solemn oaths and signed the appropriate legal documents.

An Arab phylarch

This roll also mentions the name of the Ghassanid leader Abu Karib bin Jabala, who became phylarch of Palaestina Tertia (the Byzantine district of 3rd Palestine) after the Ghassanid Arabs who ruled this region reconciled with the Byzantines in AD 528.

"His position as a phylarch is mentioned in the scroll, though he probably acted as a private mediator in an earlier dispute over the sale of the vineyard mentioned by Theodoros and Stephanos' father, now dead", Dr. Kaimio said. The date of writing of this scroll can probably be determined to the year 574.

(Significantly, the dating formulae in some dated scrolls strongly imply that Byzantine imperial orders from Constantinople reached the everyday praxis in the Near East more quickly than they reached Egypt, which confirms the continuing status of Petra as an important regional administrative centre of the Byzantine

empire in the sixth century.) Another scroll about the inheritance of the dowry of a deceased mother mostly mentions immovable property (most likely a house or land). The text specifies who will inherit the dowry in the case of the death of various relatives. The same scroll also includes the will of a man called Patrophilos, specifying that if he dies his daughter Stephanos should inherit all his property. This is a unique Middle Eastern papyrus because of the combination in a single document of these two subjects.

Taking care of mother

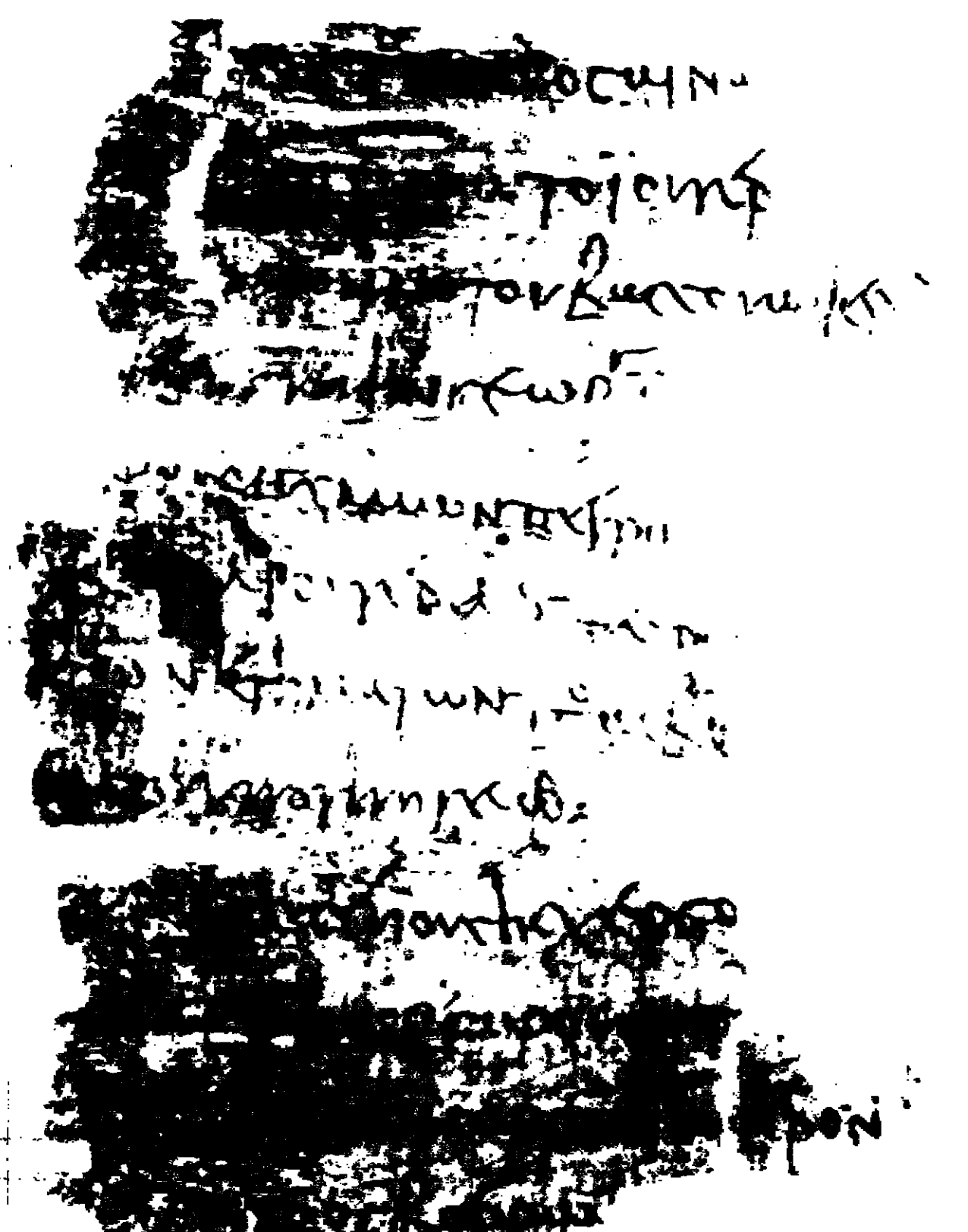
One of the largest scrolls, roll 4 named Papyrus Petra P.E. MacAllister (over 8.5 metres long) is an inventory compiled in AD 538 by a public attorney, listing property owned by the church and by two deceased people named Diphilos and Obodianos. Another scroll, roll 6 named Papyrus Petra Daniel C. and Nancy E. Gamber, measuring over four metres long contains six copies of the will compiled in AD 528 by an ailing Obodianos, son of Obodianos, who directs that, if he will not recover from the illness, his property should pass on to the Monastery of Saint High Priest Aaron and to the Hospital of Saint Martyr Kyrikos located in Petra. (It is possible that the hospital in question was the building that later was converted in part as a storage area of the church and the seat of the bishop.) The apparently terminally ill Obodianos asks that after his death his heirs should keep his mother supplied with food and clothing for the rest of her life.

A local measuring system?

Some scrolls provide information about how the people in Petra measured land. Along with the use of the "jugerum", a Roman-Byzantine era measure of land, we find the use of Kor, se'ah, and Kab. These are Hebrew fluid measures that originally measured the amount of seed needed for a parcel of land, but from early on these measures became a measure for the size of land. Moreover, papyrologist Dr. Robert Daniel of the University of Michigan team, who has been studying the scrolls for nearly the past two years, said the texts also mention a land measure called a "bathour" or "badur"; this may have a connection with the modern Arabic land measure the "sa'bihr", the latter word meaning "seed".

Other references to a measure that can possibly be read as "endefat" suggest to Dr. Daniel that the scrolls in some cases used a local system of land measures hitherto unknown. It may have been handy in cases where the land in question had a very irregular shape or was only partially arable because of stone patches and rocks. The Hebrew measures were probably no longer usable in such cases, since they had long ago become regular land measures without the flexibility that real fluid measures provided.

The papyrus archive reveals only a small segment of Petra's population, primarily some wealthy landlords and their possessions of fields, houses, and slaves, with little mention of animals and husbandry.



Part of scroll No. 10 which has produced so much valuable new information about life, law and language in 6th Century Petra (photo by Patricia Bikal)

High-tech photography

The papyri have already all been photographed by conventional techniques, but the results are often not sufficient for the study of the charred texts. Fortunately, however, a team from and supported by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) and Brigham Young University (Provo, Utah) are currently performing a preliminary multi-spectral digital imaging of the Petra scrolls. The team consists of Steven Boras, Gene Ware and Omar Kamal. They will analyse the date to determine the optimal process to produce a complete set of enhanced images for scholarly research on the texts.

Publication starts this year

The publication of some of the scrolls will commence this year.

The papyri are now in the ACOR conservation lab, with its temperature and humidity controls that are vital to prevent deterioration or disintegration of the thin, carbonised scrolls. ACOR and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan are working jointly to provide a permanent storage and display area with appropriate environmental controls. The analysis of the scrolls is conducted mainly in Jordan, but also in Finland and the USA.

The original excavation was conducted by the Amman-based American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR), in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities and with primary funding from the United States Agency for International Development.

The scrolls were excavated by Dr Zbigniew T. Fiema, assisted by Deborah Kooring and Department of Antiquities Petra inspector Suleiman Farajat, as well as by conservator Catherine Valen-

tour. Conservation work and opening of the fragments of papyrus scrolls was completed in May 1995 by a team from Finland under the leadership of Dr. Jaakko Frösén. The analysis and publication phase of the work is under way, conducted jointly by teams from the University of Michigan and the University of Helsinki, headed respectively by Dr. Ludwig Koenen and Dr. Jaakko Frösén. Over 22 international scholars have worked on the translation and analysis of the texts.

The Petra Papyri project has been sponsored and funded by ACOR, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the University of Michigan, the National Endowment for the Humanities (U.S.), the Samuel Kress Foundation (New York), the United States Information Agency, the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland, and the Academy of Finland.



Ludwig Koenen (seated) and Matthew Barnes of the University of Michigan scrolls team study parts of the Petra scrolls (photo by Patricia Bikal)

Iraq starts missile talks with U.N. arms experts amidst threats of 'substantial' military action 'within weeks'

(Continued from page 1)

States takes any military action against Iraq.

"It's not days and it's not months, so that leaves weeks," said Ms. Albright, in an interview from Kuwait broadcast on CNN's late edition, about the timeframe for a possible U.S. military attack to force Iraq to comply with U.N. resolutions.

On another point, Ms. Albright said the Clinton administration does not think it needs the U.N. Security Council to pass a new resolution before the United States can use military force against Iraq.

"We believe we have the authority for a strike," she said, adding that any use of force against Iraq would be "substantial."

Ms. Albright expressed confidence that the U.S. Congress would support any military action taken

against Iraq. "I don't think it's essential" that Congress approve a resolution supporting the action, she added.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson said Sunday that two countries — in addition to Britain — have "committed to publicly support the United States should there be a decision of force," said Mr. Richardson, who has been lobbying representatives to the World Economic Forum here.

He declined to name the countries but predicted more would follow. "There will be others. The United States will not be alone in this effort. We are actively working to build support for our policy."

"I have gotten in my discussions here in Davos a surprisingly good response when I brief member states about our intentions," he said, adding that efforts to

reach a peaceful solution to the Iraqi crisis had been all but exhausted.

"I am here to say that diplomacy is on its last legs, it is slowly dying."

Ms. Albright insisted Sunday in Jerusalem that Washington was still seeking a diplomatic solution with Iraq but said the U.S. reserved the right to use force if talks failed.

Mr. Richardson said that "on the whole" Russia and the U.S. had the same approach.

"We want Iraq to abide by the U.N. inspectors and by full access to all [military weapons] sites. Russia has been on the record four times in support of that."

"We hope in the end there will not be a difference because we value the Russian relationship," he added.

"Should the Security Council decide to take action, we want it to be strong, unmistakable

action," Mr. Richardson said.

In Baghdad, a senior Iraqi official said Sunday that a French special envoy is expected in Baghdad on Tuesday in a bid to broker a diplomatic solution to the worsening stand-off between Iraq and U.N. weapons inspectors.

"Iraq is ready to receive any envoy and to respond favourably to any proposition likely to bring about the objectives of the Iraqi people... in particular the lifting of embargo imposed upon them," said Saad Qassem Hammudi, the chairman of the Iraqi parliament's Arab and foreign affairs committee.

Diplomatic sources in Paris said the French envoy, who has not been named, would go to Baghdad "imminently," without giving further details.

French President Jacques Chirac said Saturday that

his government would deliver a firm message to Iraq over its refusal to cooperate with UNSCOM, although Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement said Sunday that Paris would not join any military action against Baghdad.

Mr. Chevènement said it was "unimaginable" that France would join military strikes, as threatened by the U.S. in a bid to see Iraq back down over its refusal to allow inspections of suspected chemical weapons sites.

"Iraq no longer poses a military threat to anyone," said Mr. Chevènement.

The interior minister's comments underscored the French preference for a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

He noted that U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright "does not lay down the law," a day after she warned from London

that any strikes against Iraq would be substantial.

Such action, said Mr. Chevènement, would fuel the fires of fundamentalism, already exacerbated by the floundering Middle East peace process.

The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which groups 55 Muslim countries, said Sunday it was concerned by the threat of a U.S. military strike against Iraq and called for more diplomatic efforts to defuse the Iraq-U.N. crisis.

"The possibility of military action against Iraq is a source of concern for the Islamic World," the organisation said.

In a message to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, the OIC "urged" the international community to make every effort to avert a new catastrophe in the region with incalculable consequences."

The group called for Mr.

Annan "to avoid resorting to force and to promote a diplomatic solution to the crisis."

Meanwhile, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami asked OIC Secretary General Ezzeddine Laraki "to use his good offices in finding a political solution to the crisis in Iraq," the official Iranian news agency IRNA said Sunday.

President Mohammed Khatami, whose country currently holds the OIC presidency, asked Mr. Laraki "to contact... Annan, and cooperate with the leaders of regional countries to end the crisis peacefully," IRNA said.

The Iranian president said there is growing concern in the region "in view of the uncertainty of the mission of the U.N. arms inspectors to Iraq and growing possibility of a renewed military action against that country."

Mr. Khatami said "com-

plete implementation of U.N. resolutions by Iraq will create the grounds for reducing tension and returning the region to peace and security."

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak also said in remarks published on Sunday that he hoped Washington would not use force against Iraq as the time was not right for a military strike in the region.

"I ask the international community to exert more diplomatic effort to reach a solution for the crisis with Iraq," he told the Al Akhbar daily. His comments were also carried by other state-owned media.

"The time is inappropriate for a military strike and will only increase the tension in the region. I urge the Iraqi leadership to contain the situation for the sake of the Iraqi people," he added.

Annan urges closer links between U.N., business

DAVOS, Switzerland (AFP) — U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan has urged closer cooperation between business and the United Nations to create an open market-place to benefit all of the world's population.

"Thriving markets and human security go hand in hand: without one, we will not have the other," Mr. Annan said in a speech to the World Economic Forum annual meeting here.

"A world of hunger, poverty and injustice is one in which markets, peace and freedom will never take root," he emphasised.

He urged the businessmen making up the bulk of the 2,000 political and financial leaders attending the meeting in this upmarket Swiss ski resort "to bring this message back home to your governments, your colleagues, your customers," that this is "an era of internationalism,

not isolationism."

"Let us choose to unite the power of markets with the authority of universal ideals," he said.

The creative forces of private entrepreneurship should be reconciled "with the needs of the disadvantaged and the requirements of future generations. Let us ensure that prosperity reaches the poor."

There has been a "fundamental shift" in the U.N.'s attitude, from dealing only with governments to dealing with non-government groups and the business world, Mr. Annan said.

But he said that a strong United Nations is also good for business.

"We help create the environment within which you can function and succeed," he added.

Meanwhile, World Trade Organisation (WTO) chief Renato Ruggiero has warned

that protectionism could only worsen Asia's financial crisis.

"The main message is that this is no time for protectionism," Mr. Ruggiero told journalists at the annual World Economic Forum here.

"Europe and the United States should be at the forefront of fighting protectionist pressure, knowing that the more they keep markets open, the quicker there will be a solution of the financial crisis," he said.

He said a solution also needed a "contribution" from Japan.

"Japan must boost domestic demand," he said, urging the country to increase imports and reduce exports.

Welcoming signals from China that it intended to maintain the value of its currency, the yuan, Mr. Ruggiero said stability was in Beijing's own interests since it would help spur the growth of its neighbours.

"This means China will have to make efforts to increase productivity through structural changes," he indicated.

Widespread devaluations to boost trade competitiveness "would be a tragic event. We would go back to the situation of the 1930s," he said.

U.S. economy ends '97 with a bang but outlook clouded for '98

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The U.S. economy ended 1997 with robust fourth-quarter growth of 4.3 per cent, better than anticipated, but analysts said the outlook for this year is clouded by the crisis in Asia.

For all of last year, according to the Commerce Department, U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) expanded 3.8 per cent, compared with 2.8 per cent in 1996 and the strongest pace in nine years.

But this year, the momentum is expected to flag. Friday's report "shows very clear signs of how the economy will slow down in early 1998," said David Kelly of Primark Decision Economics.

"We expect growth to slow down to 2.1 per cent during 1998," said Bruce Steinberg, an economist with the commercial bank Merrill Lynch.

"Superficially, the economy appeared to accelerate in the fourth quarter but appearances can be deceiving ... We expect a deteriorating trade balance to subtract up to three-quarters of a percentage point from U.S. GDP growth in 1998," he added.

Mr. Steinberg noted that growth in consumer spending slowed to 3.2 per cent in the fourth quarter from 3.6 per cent in the third, while business investment in capital goods fell 3.9 per cent in the final three months of the year, compared with a third-quarter gain of 24.1 per cent.

Mr. Steinberg and other economists are concerned that weaker currencies in Asia will reduce import prices, thereby putting pressure on U.S. producers, while acting as a brake on U.S. exports.

Federal Reserve (Fed) Chairman Alan Greenspan on Thursday predicted that such an impact on U.S. trade should become evident by the end of June.

Weaker currencies tend to drive up the price of U.S. exports, making them more expensive and less attractive to consumers.

Delos Smith, an economist with The Conference Board, a New York-based research group, speculated that Asian countries might be hesitant to flood U.S. markets with their goods.

"The Asian countries probably will have some kind of self-control," he said. "If they don't, if they just absolutely overwhelm us, there will be protective issues."

"That's true of Europe too. It will make Western governments furious and they don't want to do that," Mr. Smith added.

The value of U.S. exports increased 11.3 per cent in the fourth quarter to \$26.3 billion, while the gain in imports was limited to 1.3 per cent, to \$20.5 billion, according to preliminary government figures.

"Exports up 11.3 per cent, imports up 1.3 per cent — that's a combination we are not going to see for a long time," said Mr. Smith.

Other factors pointing to

weaker growth at the start of 1998 are a 26 per cent increase in business inventories to \$59.9 billion and expected sluggish consumer spending in the face of a decline in after-tax disposable income.

"It won't be quite as bad as people think," said Mr. Smith of the slowdown.

"It really depends on how grim you want to make it. When I am saying grim I refer to the trade situation. For growth I would say 2.5 to three per cent for 1998," he added.

"In our view, quarterly GDP growth will settle near the 2.5 per cent level, compared with the 3.8 per cent average growth for all of 1997," said David Orr, economist at First Union Corporation.

"However, the slowdown should be concentrated in a fairly narrow range of industries impacted by foreign trade. Most sectors of the economy should not experience a significantly different trend in business activity during 1998 than in 1997," Mr. Orr concluded.

Mr. Greenspan said last week that Asia's turmoil had cooled inflation pressures in the booming U.S. economy, suggesting the central bank is in no rush to change key interest rates soon.

Mr. Greenspan told lawmakers the Fed would remain vigilant in the face of excessively tight labour markets but warned the financial crisis that has ravaged much of Asia was certain to hit the seven-year-old U.S. expansion "before spring is over."

"We must be vigilant to the reemergence of destabilising influences — both higher inflation, and shortfalls in demand and decreases in some prices that would press the disinflation process too far, too fast," Mr. Greenspan told the Senate Budget Committee in his first appearance on Capitol Hill this year.

Financial markets around the globe rallied as investors perceived his words as the strongest indication yet that the Fed will be on hold for as long as it will take policy-makers to figure out the Asian crises' effects on the U.S. economy.

"We just love him. He told us exactly what we wanted to hear — healthy economic growth, continuing disinflation and, most importantly, no rise in interest rates soon," said Sung Won Sohn, chief economist at Norwest Corp. in Minneapolis.

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Save the Children is recruiting for the position of PROGRAMME MANAGER

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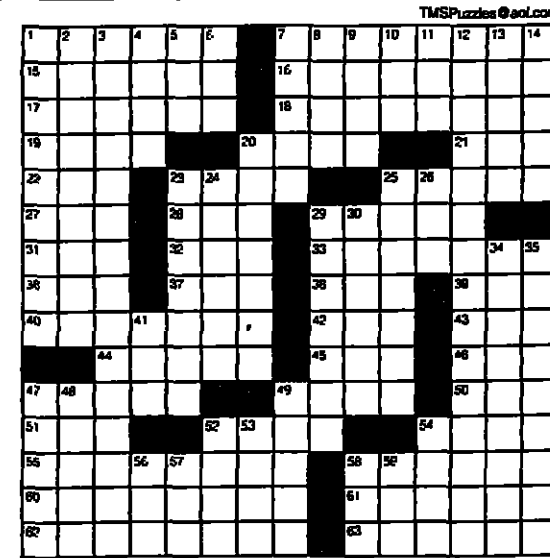
Interested candidates should send their CV by fax to: 612902 or P.O. Box 9363, Amman 11191, Jordan. CVs received after February 8, 1998 will not be considered.

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

1. Grip aid
7. Pampas plain
16. Investigate
17. Author of "Little Women"
18. Deadly
19. Long-haired pack animals
20. Merchandise division
21. Corner pipe
22. Religious figs.
23. Pursuit of the Grey
25. Refresh
27. Rock group, — Fighters
28. Mechanical tooth
29. "The Zoo Story" dramatist
31. Beattie or Blyth
32. Abner
33. Yellow fellows
36. Arctic surface
37. Chemical suffix
38. Say what?
39. Korean car make
40. Vacation spots
42. Roman 3
43. Human seat
44. Highland hillsides
45. Superlative ending
46. Electees
47. Playwright Capek
49. Oh, yeah
50. Ms. Bondarev
51. Latin suffix for plurals
52. Refrain from
54. Whipping scar
55. Caleb Carr novel, with "The"
58. Small crowns
60. Very reliable
61. Wear away
62. Evaluator
63. Mrs. Marcus

- DOWN**
1. Follows rules
 2. Out of the blue



By Tom Pruce
Chicago, IL

3. Thinks and thinks
4. Slaughter in Cooperstown
5. "To Have and Have —"
6. Mach topper
7. Came film
8. Part of speech
9. Color variation
10. Likable candidate?
11. Mister
12. Bleeding heart
13. Novelist
14. Calvino
20. Falling-down drunk
23. Of part of the eye
24. Ballet position
25. "Stuart Little" author
26. Teachers' org.
28. Most sore
30. Actress
34. "Wild at Heart" co-star

35. Laurel and Hardy classic
41. Mispickel, e.g.
47. Mecca shrine
48. Map book
49. Change starter?
52. Claim to a share
53. Capital of Norway
54. Soft ending?
56. Cope
57. "Emerald Point
58. Skater
59. Baboonia
60. PC maker

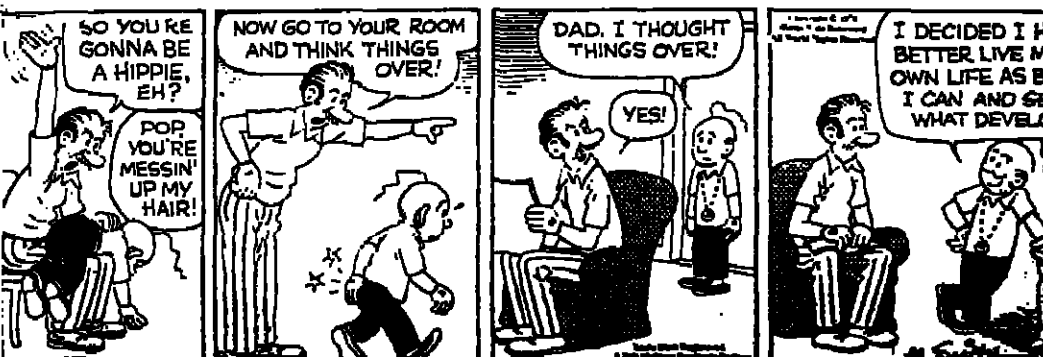
Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You have a very quick mind, but sometimes you get impatient. For the next several weeks, you'll have a little extra perseverance and a longer attention span. That will be helpful this afternoon, when you're trying to figure out a complicated puzzle involving money.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You might think some people like to do new things just because they're new. You might be right about that. You've got the best chance of getting your point across later on this evening. Don't even bother to argue before then.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You might get a nice travel opportunity. If you've saved up (unlikely), you could take a trip to some distant land. Otherwise, perhaps a person from a distant land will invite you to visit. Why don't you look around for somebody who's liable to do that, and make the suggestion?

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You're not really interested in taking care of people today, but if you can bring yourself to do it, you'll be glad you did. Actually, it will be a little bit easier than it has been before, once you get into the project. And besides, it looks like your boss or another older person may be insisting upon it.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Mercury goes into Aquarius this morning, which is in your solar Seventh House of partners. They'll be better with words than usual. In fact, you'll find it difficult to get a word in edgewise. Don't get into an argument with one of those people. You don't stand a chance.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Your motivation in life is to take care of others. One way you do this is by helping them stay organised. Today, you have the opportunity to do it for a co-worker. The only problem is that you're going to have a figure out how to do the job first. Don't worry. You'll have tomorrow to work on this project, too.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) This is a good time for you and your sweetheart to make plans for the future. You can set high goals this year, because you're willing to take risks to make them happen. Be careful not to spend too much, or you could be in for a huge case of buyer's remorse this afternoon.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) It may be hard to keep your mind on your job today, especially in the morning. If you can take today off to finish up a few things at home, do it. You'll probably have to go in this afternoon. By then you should have things well settled. This afternoon looks good for meetings with decision-makers.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) For the next few weeks, you'll have more patience with technical matters. So, if there's something you've been trying to fix, take another look at that manual. You rarely have the patience to do that, but today is an exception. Find a really good how-to book and curl up with it tonight.

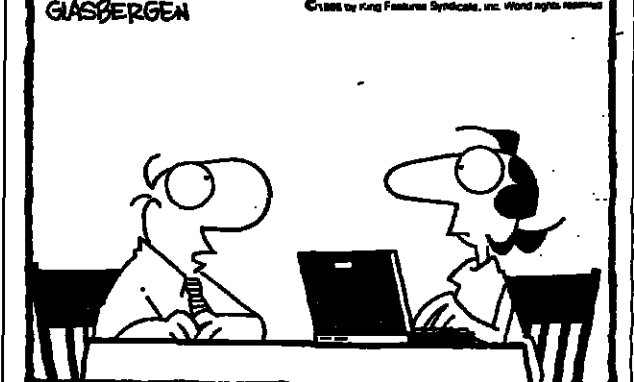
CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Money becomes a major issue in your life. You may actually have more than you need, maybe even enough to start planning the vacation of your dreams. At the very least, it's a marvellous day to make the commitment. If you wait until tonight, somebody who'd like to go with you would love to help with that decision.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Today, you'll be quick, curious and eager to learn. You'll be fascinated by everything you lay eyes on. This should be an interesting few weeks, but this evening it could be a problem. You'll be dancing circles around someone who's trying to tell you what to do. Be patient.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Today marks the beginning of a complicated phase. You'll be doing paperwork in connection with big companies or educational institutions. You're a little stressed about money right now. That's OK. Everything will work out fine. Just take your time and do it right, so you don't have to do it over.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen



"My boss says I don't accept responsibility for my actions. I blame my parents for that."

JUMBLE. THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

Unscramble these four jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

MAFLE

EWLEH

ENGINS

SLAMEY

Answer: A FLEA FOR A HOLE

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: OUTDO TEPID EITHER DELUGE

Answer: Why the gardener knew all the family gossip — HE DUG UP THE DIRT.

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Government considering higher equity for foreign investors in contracting sector

THE GOVERNMENT is still studying whether it is beneficial to raise the ownership percentage for foreign investors in the contracting sector, Industry, Trade and Supply Minister Hani Mulki has said. He indicated that this sector was exempted from the 100 per cent ownership allowed for foreign investors last year because the sector is very large and includes many areas such as the construction of buildings and roads as well as water projects.

Noting that the objective from raising the ownership percentage to foreign investors in any sector is to transfer the advanced expertise and hi tech and to employ national labour, Dr. Mulki said that the Higher Council for Investment has assigned the Investment Promotion Corporation the task of putting a detailed definition to all exempted sectors. "As such, it will be possible to liberalise the other sectors which consolidate the objectives aspired from such liberalisation," the minister said.

Reem Badran, the deputy director general of the Investment Promotion Corporation, confirmed that the sectors which were exempted from the 100 per cent ownership by foreign investors will be studied anew to ensure the feasibility from raising the level of foreign equity (Al Aswaq).

IMF asks government to reconsider retirement pay for military personnel

THE INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund (IMF) has called on the government to reconsider from time to time the military retirement policies and to take into consideration the economic and social changes and the political situation and the change in the defence policy. In a study about the military retirement system, the IMF said it would be difficult to evaluate the previous changes on the military retirement until, at least, the middle of the next century.

Noting that retirement payments to military personnel represent about 77 per cent of government retirement expenditure, the IMF indicated that the situation would continue for many years. The fund stressed the importance of transferring all new military recruits to the Social Security Corporation records and stretching the minimum period for retirement eligibility from 16 years to 20 years with even longer periods for officers.

The IMF advised the government to adopt policies that aim at limiting the burgeoning of financial obligation resulting from government retirement payments. It proposed halting any increase in retirement salaries and allocating any necessary raise to those who get low retirement payments (Al Arab Al Yawm).

India, Syria in talks over \$675 million of investment

DAMASCUS (AFP) — India and Syria are holding talks over plans to invest up to \$675 million of Indian money in projects in Syria, the Al Baath newspaper reported on Sunday.

Projects under discussion include the production of phosphates and fertilizers, and the enlarging of Syrian ports, said the government-run paper.

The managing director of the Indian company Aswal, Anil Bhala, is expected in Syria on Monday for talks about the projects at the Syrian agriculture and industry ministry, the Indian embassy here said.

Syria produces around two million tonnes a year of phosphates, most of which are exported to Europe and Lebanon.

Asian crisis will cut profits growth in U.S. and Europe — bank

PARIS (AFP) — The financial crisis in Asia will cut growth of corporate profits in the United States and Europe by two to three percentage points this year, Societe Generale Bank has forecast.

But the bank forecast that company profits in the United States would rise all the same by an average of 5.0 per cent in 1998, and that profits in Europe would increase by at least 15.0 per cent.

Companies in France would increase their earnings by 21.0 per cent, the bank said.

The bank forecast that "long-lasting and profound" effects of the crisis in Asia would be matched notably by the effects of restructuring linked to the launch of the euro single currency. This would increase profits and and share prices.

Low pay inflation and growth of productivity would also contribute to an increase of profits.

Groups making capital goods, luxury or technological products might suffer a decline of exports to Asia owing to a fall of demand in the region and depreciation of Asian currencies, said the European strategist at the bank, Alain Bokobza.

Exports from Asia to Europe might increase and this might affect notably the textile and steel industries and, to a lesser extent, the paper, car and technological industries, he said.

European companies established in Asia, such as Nestle or Unilever in the food sector, of French, German and British banks, would be affected mainly by unfavourable exchange rates.

Societe Generale forecast that European stock markets would rise in 1998 and that Wall Street would steady following three years of strong growth.

Ministry moving to stop popular restaurants from hiking prices

By Issam Qadmani
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Ministry of Supply and the Association of Restaurant Owners are enforcing strict measures against popular restaurants following public complaints regarding unjustified hikes of prices at those restaurants.

Yassin Akkash, the association president, admitted that certain restaurants took advantage of the 'Eid Al Fitr holiday and hiked prices beyond the ceiling agreed on with the Ministry of Supply. But Mr. Akkash warned that the Ministry of Supply in conjunction with the association board were imposing strict measures to prevent further violations.

He said: "In the past, restaurant owners used to complain about the poor income but now they are violating the ministry's set of rules which allowed them higher and acceptable income."

He said that the association has asked for deterrent measures from the Ministry of Supply to prevent further violations, adding that association's board will meet during this week with officials from the ministry to discuss the situation.

Financial turmoil cuts rating of many insurers in Asia

SINGAPORE (AFP) — The credits ratings of many insurers in troubled Asian economies have been downgraded and the prospects of those overly exposed to asset markets are bleak, global ratings agency Standard and Poor's has warned.

The immediate prospects will be bleak for some of the smaller players or players who are over exposed to the equity and real estate markets," said Melissa Mackey, associate director of insurance ratings at Standard and Poor's.

She told reporters that the ratings of almost all the insurance companies in South Korea, Indonesia and Thailand had been downgraded while those in other countries reeling from financial turmoil were being closely monitored.

Asia's insurance industry had been growing rapidly as people buoyed by a rise in wages in line with booming economic growth locked in their savings in insurance policies.

But the regional currency crisis, sparked off by Thailand's July 2 float of the baht, caused stock and real estate prices to crash as it wreaked havoc on financial markets and shook public confidence in financial institutions.

"The (currency) volatility makes it very difficult for many insurance companies to manage their business," Ms. Mackey said.

Standard and Poor's primary reason for downgrading the companies' ratings was the devaluation of their assets — equities and properties, she added at a media conference announcing the Triple A rating conferred on American International Assurance (AIA) Co. Ltd. by Standard and Poor's.

AIA Co. Ltd., a multi-line insurance company incorporated in Hong Kong, is the largest life insurance organisation in South East Asia and conducts business in Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

The "AAA" rating means, among other qualities, "superior financial security on an absolute and relative basis."

Ms. Mackey said that in the case of non-life insurers, they held significant amounts of their assets in equities and properties and the devaluation impact eroded their net asset positions.

"This increases their vulnerability to future claims' volatility," she said.

Ms. Mackey said another reason for the ratings downgrade of the insurance companies was the prevailing economic slowdown in the region stemming from the financial turmoil.

"This is going to put pressure on premium volumes which will not grow the same as before. They will grow but broadly in line with the lower levels of projected GDP growth of economies," she said.

Ms. Mackey said troubled local insurance companies would have to seek capital to survive, given their asset devaluation, by mergers with foreign partners, as are already taking place in some economies.

Standard and Poor's ratings for many Asian insurance companies were downgraded from the secure range of between "AAA" and "BBB" to the vulnerable range of between "BBB" and "CCC."

Amid slowing economic and market conditions, Standard and Poor's was confident of AIA maintaining its market leadership in Singapore and Thailand, and increasing market share in both Indonesia and Malaysia.

Bill Beatty, senior vice-president and general manager of AIA Singapore, said: "At a time when doubts are mounting on Asia's economic stability, this rating is a recognition of our sound financial standing."

Mr. Beatty said AIA Singapore posted a 60 per cent rise in premium income to 350 million dollars (\$205.88 million) for the financial year to Nov. 30, 1997 but may not be able to sustain the robust growth this year.

He declined to forecast growth for 1998 but said it could be in the 20 per cent range over the next three-to-five years.

Mr. Beatty said that his company had introduced U.S. dollar-denominated insurance policies to offer a higher diversified investment portfolio.

Representing 95 per cent of total company business, three of AIA's largest branches are located in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	1.0000	1.9365	0.6122	1.4780	127.00	1.4629	1806.36	2.0642	6.1340
DE Mark	0.5181	1.0000	0.3342	0.8062	69.38	0.7935	986.84	1.1278	3.3606
GB Sterling	0.6355	2.9878	1.0000	2.4173	207.46	2.3733	2980.87	3.3719	10.0199
CH Franc	0.8775	123.98	0.4145	1.0000	86.04	0.9840	1223.40	139.84	4.1644
JP Yen	0.0078	1.4402	0.4816	1.1613	1.0000	1.1431	14.21	162.41	4.8261
CA Dollar	0.6883	1.2315	0.4171	0.9979	1.14	1.0000	1216.22	1.3877	4.1254
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0192	0.3387	0.8617	1423.89	0.8942	1.0000	11.43	3.3852
NL Guilder	0.4844	88.86	0.2984	0.7149	81.49	0.7037	874.87	1.0000	2.9709
FR Franc	0.1630	6.5548	0.0998	2.4687	20.69	0.2368	33.66	33.6600	1.0000

Middle Eastern Currencies									
Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	1.0000	0.7090	3.7804	0.3770	3.6410	0.3063	3.6727	1627.00	3.4060
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	1.0000	5.2897	0.5317	5.1354	0.4306	5.1801	2183.74	4.8026
Saudi Riyal	0.2666	0.1890	1.0000	0.1005	0.97	0.0814	0.98	407.16	0.9079
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8807	9.5485	1.0000	9.66	0.8099	9.74	4050.61	9.0323
Qatar Dinar	0.2746	0.1947	1.0300	1.0300	1.0000	0.0839	1.01	419.39	0.9352
Kuwait Dinar	3.2765	2.3223	12.2843	1.2348	11.93	1.0000	12.03	5001.84	0.9352
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0212	1.0206	0.9914	0.0831	1.00	415.77	0.9271
Lebanese L1000	0.65	0.4643	2.4561	0.2469	2.3844	0.1899	2.4082	1.0000	2.2299
Egyptian	0.2937	0.2082	1.1014	0.1107	1.0583	0.0897	1.0785	448.48	-

Energy									
Oil	Last	Previous							
Brent	16.72	16.43							
W. Texas	17.18	17.30							
Bonny	15.72	16.43							
Dubai	14.28	13.93							
UL Gas	161.00	160.00							

JOD Cross Rates									
Currency	Buy	Sell							
US Dollar	0.708	0.710							
GB Sterling	1.1654	1.1612							
DE Mark	0.3861	0.388							
CH Franc	0.4791	0.4815							
FR Franc	0.1153	0.1168							
JP Yen	0.5563	0.5591							
NL Guilder	0.3426	0.3443							
IT Lira	0.3915	0.3935							

Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)									
Period	1 -	3 -	6 -	9 -	1 -				
C'ntry	Months	Months	Months	Months	Year				
USD	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.57				
GBP	7.48	7.40	7.40	7.28	7.19				
JPY	0.45	0.41	0.45	0.54	0.47				
DEM	3.40	3.46	3.58	3.50	3.71				
FRF	3.44	3.55	3.64	3.76	3.83				
CHF	0.98	1.12	1.27	1.18	1.26				
ITL	6.18	6.06	6.73	6.39	6.14				

Major Equity Indices									
Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cts			
New York DOW JONES	7906.5	-68.52	-0.83	7965.97	7893.05	7973.02			
New York S&P 500	980.28	-6.21	-0.63	987.41	979.63	985.49			
London FT-SE 100	5498.5	36.1	0.67	5498.5	5389.5	5422.4			
Tokyo NIKKEI 225	16628.47	-386.12	-2.27	17011.1	16627.4	17014.6			
Paris CAC 40	3172.14	38.32	1.22	3173.98	3124.13	3133.82			
Frankfurt DAX	4440.38	21	0.48	4450.12	4422.43	4419.38			

World Bank lends Egypt \$960 million

CAIRO (AFP) — The World Bank has extended \$960 million of new loans to Egypt at preferential interest rates to finance a range of development projects, bank officials here told AFP Sunday.

The loans, to be handed over in the course of the next three years, include \$700 million to be paid back over 20 years at an interest rate of between 6.5 and seven per cent, said World Bank spokeswoman Sahar Nasser. She added that a further \$260 million of loans would be paid back over 35 years at a token interest rate of 0.75 per cent to cover administrative costs.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET									
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHAMSAT									
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179									
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SUNDAY 01/02/1998									
PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF SHARES	NO. OF TRADED	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE
N 2.340	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	10.1	0.00	7	102550	183500	1.80	1.76	-0.04
S 2.680	INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK.	10.1	6.18	3	5400	9179	1.70	1.69	-0.01
S 4.050	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	12.0	4.09	7	3546	8396	2.39	2.35	-0.04
BANK SECTOR TOTALS INDEX: 232.84 CHNG: -0.14 18 111521 201099									
2.050	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	9.4	5.13	16	32388	63130	1.94	1.95	+0.01
1.550	NATL. PORTFOLIO	9	0.00	11	7150	7293	1.04	1.02	-0.02
1.650	JORDAN INTL. TRAD.	24.6	0.00	1	250	320	1.47	1.48	+0.01
1.590	MID. EAST HOTELS	18.3	0.00	1	500	600	1.20	1.20	-
4.000	ARAB INTL. INV. EDUC.	10.1	0.00	4	1400	8432	3.92	3.88	-0.04
2.160	UNIFIED CO.	8.0	6.51	2	500	845	1.72	1.69	-0.03
840	UNION LAND DEV.	9	0.00	1	1000	660	1.70	1.66	-0.04
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS INDEX: 116.15 CHNG: -0.39 36 43188 78000									
4.450	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	20.1	3.68	14	5877	17576	3.02	2.99	-0.03
4.700	ARAB PHARM. IND.	12.0	4.60	12	6680	28825	4.36	4.35	-0.01
1.650	LIVERPOOL & POLTRY	9.3	0.00	13	5650	2486	1.45	1.44	-0.01
1.130	INTERMED. PETRO. CHEM.	9	0.00	11	4350	1795	1.42	1.42	-
S 3.000	NATL. CABLE WIRE. PFC.	26.5	0.00	1	50	55	1.07	1.10	+0.03
1.800	JOR. SULPHO-CHEN.	15.2	5.88	3	1600	1904	1.22	1.19	-0.03
S 1.610	ARAB PHARM. CHEM.	15.2	5.88	3	1600	1904	1.22	1.19	-0.03
1.800	UNIV. MOON. INDS.	7	26	11	7750	6438	0.85	0.83	-0.02
S 1.410	JOR. IND. RESOURCES	10.0	13.51	5	3000	2143	0.75	0.74	-0.01
1.620	NATL. CHLORINE	14.1	4.67	1	1600	2400	1.50	1.50	-
810	JORDAN STEEL	31.7	7.14	1	200	140	0.70	0.70	-
840	MID. EAST COMPLEX	7.5	16.39	2	450	275	0.62	0.61	-0.01
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS INDEX: 110.24 CHNG: -0.20 76 37427 64181									
GRAND TOTAL INDEX: 166.54 CHNG: -0.17 130 192136 343359									
PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SUNDAY 01/02/1998									
530	CENTRAL GEN. STORAGE	0.00	0.00	1	500	160	0.33	0.32	-0.01
140	JOR. TRADE FAC.	9.6	0.00	23	97100	34956	0.37	0.36	-0.01
1570	ARAB FIN. INVEST.	0.00	0.00	24	23518	12374	0.53	0.54	+0.01
N 1.050	SPECIALIZED JOR. TS	0.00	0.00	1	500	105	0.05	0.06	+0.01
N 1.000	ARAB JOR. INVEST. CO.	0.00	0.00	1	250	240	0.92	0.96	+0.04
750	NATL. MULT. ENG. HANICO	0.00	0.00	13	32000	13630	0.45	0.43	-0.02
N 1.200	READY MIX CONCRETE	12.8	0.00	2	1000	1060	1.01	1.05	+0.05
670	PEARL SH. CONV.	2.3	0.00	2	160	68	0.48	0.46	-0.02
N 950	OPTICAL HEARING TS	2	0.00	2	20000	8200	0.69	0.66	-0.03
N 1.000	ALUMINUM. 75	93.2	0.00	2	5000	2100	0.67	0.67	-

Australian Open

Korda crushes Rios in final

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Petr Korda moved off the Grand Slam ailing list and checked into a career-high No. 2 ranking after a straight sets mauling of Chilean Marcelo Rios in the Australian Open final Sunday.

Long regarded as one of the best players never to have won a Grand Slam champion, the 30-year-old Czech achieved his dream amid much emotion and exhilaration.

Korda, whose tennis has been blighted by injury and illness, turned back the clock, to inflict one of the heaviest defeats in Australian Open history.

In 85 minutes it was all over. Rios was crushed 6-2, 6-2, 6-2. Korda climbed into the players' box to hug his wife Regina and daughter Jessica. He threw his shirt and racket into the crowd.

Yet the spindly sixth seed, a crowd favourite with his trademark scissor kicks, is making no promises about returning to defend his crown.

"No, I can't promise to anyone. At the end of 1998 I'll sit together with my family, with my coach, and we will see what is going to happen," Korda told a post-match conference.

"I'm very hungry at the moment, and there is a very big chance I'll be here in 1999. But I don't want to rush any decision. I want to enjoy my year."

Korda made a remarkable return last year to No. 7 after two years of chronic injury problems which forced his ranking to as low as 41 and nearly made him quit.

The candid Czech said after his third round win over American Vince Spadea: "My clock is now at five to midnight and I am



Petr Korda of the Czech Republic holds the Australian Open men's tennis trophy and a toy kangaroo after his straight sets victory in Melbourne February 1. Korda defeated Chile's Marcelo Rios 6-2, 6-2, 6-2 (Reuters photo)

just going to enjoy every minute."

Korda has jumped to the number two ranking, surpassing his previous best five attained after his only other grand slam final when beaten by Jim Courier

at the 1992 French Open.

Korda dismissed suggestions that he could take over from Pete Sampras as No. 1.

"Don't push me on this one on the race to number one," he said. "I'm the old-

est one here at the moment, so let me enjoy this year."

"If I'm going to be three, one or five I'd be so happy. If I make No. 1 that's going to be a great achievement, but the attitude is different to other people."

"I could retire happy even without the Slam because I gave 100 per cent."

Korda, churned by nerves in what he said was probably his worst 48 hours leading up to the final, said he had spoken to tennis legend John McEnroe and had calmed himself by telling himself: "I am not battling for life, why not enjoy it."

He was confident he had the measure of the moody Rios, who has admitted he was once a 'tanker', someone who gave up hard matches.

"I knew I'm a bigger fighter than he is and I knew once I put him under pressure he could give up. My father always told me, 'you have to work until the umpire says, game, set and match.'"

Asked if Rios had given up in the final, Korda said, "you have to ask him."

Rios, 22, said he was not nervous going into his first Grand Slam final but the six-match run tired him.

"I lost co-ordination and didn't get into my playing rhythm and he had a lot more experience than me," he said.

Korda paid tribute to his father, Petr, for giving him his first racket and teaching him to play tennis, and his wife and former women's player Regina Rajchrtova, who sacrificed her career to make him believe in himself.

The Czech also thanked his former coach Tony Pickard who played a key role in Korda's revival, forcing him to have career-saving surgery.

"Before he left here he told me 'Win the tournament.'"

"And I'm just happy I could follow his, I don't want to say 'advice, but his wish.'"

Bayern reduce gap at top

BONN (AFP) — Bayern Munich reduced the gap to two points between themselves and leaders Kaiserslautern on Saturday beating Hamburg 3-0 while their Brazilian striker Giovane Elber scored the fastest goal in the Bundesliga's 35-year history.

Kaiserslautern, the first newly promoted side to head the mid-winter break standings, drew 1-1 away at UEFA Cup holders Schalke 04 while on Friday third placed Stuttgart drew 1-1 at home to Duisburg to stay 10 points off the leaders — Bayer Leverkusen can leapfrog into third if they beat Karlsruhe away on Sunday.

Elber, who was signed from Stuttgart during the winter break, struck just 11 seconds into the encounter with Hamburg, beating the previous record of 12 seconds set by St. Pauli's Dirk Zander against Karlsruhe on April 12, 1991.

Elber added a second in the 42nd minute and former Rapid Vienna striker Carsten Jancker their third in the 56th minute to send the 1983 European Cup winners to the bottom of the table.

Kaiserslautern, under the astute coaching skills of Otto Rehhagel, snatched a ninth minute lead through Bulgarian international striker Marian Hristov but then lost control of the midfield battle and Schalke levelled in the 58th minute through Dutchman Marco Van Hoogdalem.

Elsewhere former German international and Celtic striker Andreas Thom took just two minutes to score on his debut for Hertha Berlin as the newly promoted side beat fellow newboys Wolfsburg 1-0.

In the battle of two fallen giants veteran Austrian striker Toni Polster scored the decisive goal for the three time champions Cologne as they beat Borussia Monchengladbach 3-2 in what was effectively a six pointer relegation battle. Their plight is only slightly worse than European Cup holders Borussia Dortmund who went down to their eighth loss of the season on Friday away at VfL Bochum and are now 11th only three points above the relegation places. Dortmund playmaker and German star Andy Moller summed the feelings up in the club by saying "It's clear we are now in a struggle to avoid relegation."

SCOREBOARD

NBA			
Atlanta	103	Charlotte	83
Cleveland	90	Detroit	88
Phoenix	96	Orlando	94
Houston	102	Philadelphia	86
Denver	110	Dallas	98
New Jersey	116	Vancouver	106

NHL			
Washington	3	Philadelphia	2 (OT)
Boston	4	NY Rangers	2
Florida	2	Tampa Bay	0
Los Angeles	3	Chicago	0
Pittsburgh	4	Detroit	2
San Jose	5	Colorado	2
St Louis	6	Dallas	3
Ottawa	4	Montreal	3
Phoenix	5	Toronto	2
Calgary	2	New Jersey	2 (OT)
Vancouver	6	Edmonton	3

Portuguese First Division			
Farense	1	Sporting Braga	1
Boavista Porto	6	A. Coimbra	0
Belenenses	1	FC Porto	0

French League Cup			
Marseille	3	Nancy	0
Martigues	0	Metz	2
Sochaux	1	Cannes	0
Lens	1	Niort	0 AET
Auxerre	3	Toulouse	1 AET

Spanish First Division			
Majorca	5	Tenerife	1
Oviedo	0	Betis	0
Athletic Bilbao	1	Salamanca	0

Belgian first division			
Anderlecht	2	Lierse	0
Antwerp	2	Lommel	1
Lokeren	1	Standard Liege	3
Charleroi	3	Mouscron	0
Saint-Trond	0	Beveren	0
Westerlo	0	Ghent	1

Tunisia v Guinea friendly			
Tunisia	4	Guinea	1

Scottish Premier Division			
Dunfermline	3	Kilmarnock	2
Hearts	2	Dundee Utd	0
Motherwell	6	Hibernian	2
St Johnstone	2	Rangers	0

English Premiership			
Arsenal	3	Southampton	0
Bolton	1	Coventry	5
Chelsea	2	Barnsley	0
Crystal Palace	0	Leeds United	2
Derby	2	Tottenham	1
Liverpool	0	Blackburn	0
Man Utd	0	Leicester	1
Sheff Wed	1	Wimbledon	1
West Ham	2	Everton	2

Bundesliga			
Hertha Berlin	1	Wolfsburg	0
Schalke 04	1	Kaiserslautern	1
Werder Bremen	2	A. Bielefeld	1
Hansa Rostock	3	1860 Munich	0
B. Munich	3	Hamburg	0
Cologne	3	B. Monch.	2



Americans Venus Williams and Justin Gimelstob (R) display their mixed doubles trophy with a soft toy kangaroo after winning the final at the Australian Open. They beat Helena Sukova and Cyril Suk of the Czech Republic 6-2, 6-1 (Reuters photo)



Chile's Marcelo Rios grimaces as he wipes the sweat from his head during his match against Petr Korda in the final of the Australian Open (Reuters photo)

Hingis refuses to be knocked off course

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Martina Hingis celebrated her Australian Open triumph by watching the movie "Titanic" and it will take a disaster of similar proportions to knock her off course this year.

A special private showing of the blockbuster was organised for Hingis and some friends at a Melbourne casino on Saturday night after her straight sets victory over Conchita Martinez of Spain.

The 17-year-old had been wanting to watch the three-and-a-half movie for the past two weeks but it would have kept her up too late.

She needed the rest. Hingis said get-

ting the Australian Open for a second straight time had been the toughest of her four Grand Slam titles.

There was no doubting who was the queen of the Melbourne Park, but she must now go on to the Pan Pacific WTA tournament in Tokyo knowing the pressures will only increase.

Former world number ones Steffi Graf and Monica Seles were not in Melbourne, but they loom as icebergs in her path. Hingis insisted though that the Australian Open was a major breakthrough for the teen players.

On top of the women's singles crown, Hingis won the women's doubles with 15-year-old Croat Mirjana Lucic.

Seventeen-year-old Venus Williams got her first Grand Slam title in the mixed doubles with fellow-American Justin Gimelstob.

"At this tournament you could really see what the young players can achieve, how good they are," said Hingis, adding her third round tie against the 16-year-old Russian, Anna Kournikova, had been the toughest of the two weeks.

"I was playing Grand Slam doubles with Mirjana for the first time and we won it right away. So it was a big effort. Kournikova gave me a hard time in the singles and everybody knows that the Williams sisters can play."

"I think in the future you are really

going to see how tennis has changed," said Hingis.

It has become almost a second nature for the Swiss teenager to win and break records. She was the youngest player to retain a Grand Slam title and is going to make a determined effort to win all four majors this year.

"I'm kind of proud of myself, what I did Saturday and in these two weeks," she said.

But Hingis is sensitive about the threat from Seles and Graf, sidelined with personal and injury problems.

Hingis said she did not care that Graf would not be in Tokyo this week after pulling out of another planned come-

back because of her injured left knee.

"It doesn't really matter to me and it's probably a little disappointing for her, not for me, because I know how hard it is to come back."

"She has been away out of tennis for a long time so it is more disappointing for her that she cannot play."

Hingis also defended her record against the two tennis legends.

"Against Monica, when she was playing her best tennis, I beat her. I beat her all the time. I never lost to her, so I was able to play better than she did at that time."

"Most of the time I played in the finals, or the semi-final at the French

Open, so I don't think that was a bad effort."

"As for Steffi, I just couldn't play her for over a year, so that is probably a bit disappointing."

"I would love to play her again. But when she comes back it's probably not going to be the same any more as she was on a high. But it's definitely going to be interesting for me to see her on the other side again."

The extent of the challenge posed by fellow teens she can assess from having played them so often. Graf and Seles are unknown quantities now and means that Hingis cannot afford to feel that she is unsinkable.

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	PHILADELPHIA "1"	PHILADELPHIA "2"	PLAZA	CONCORD	GALLERIA 2	GALLERIA 1	NOW ON DAILY
	Pierce Brosnan as James Bond 007...TOMORROW NEVER DIES Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	PINOCCHIO Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15 THE PEACEMAKER Shows: 8:30, 10:30	SPEED 2 Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30 GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE Shows: 12:00, 2:00, 5:00	CONCORD "1" Adel Imam & Yusra ... in RISALA ILA AL WALI (ARABIC) Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30 CONCORD "2" MR. BEAN Shows: 12:15, 1:30, 3:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	ABDOUN Adel Imam & Yusra ... in RISALA ILA AL WALI (ARABIC) Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:45 HERCULES Shows: 12:30 only LION KING Shows: 11:00 a.m. only	ABDOUN HOME ALONE 3 Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30 STARSHIP TROOPERS Shows: 8:30, 10:30 p.m.	THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas For reservations call: 640155, 625155

Cavaliers beat Pistons

CLEVELAND (AP) — Zdrunas Ilgauskas had a career-high 32 points and 13 rebounds, and Shawn Kemp added 27 points and 15 rebounds Saturday night as the Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Detroit Pistons 90-88.

Ilgauskas, the 221-centimetre rookie centre from Lithuania, and Kemp combined to make 23-of-31 from the field as Cleveland went to its inside game after learning that rookie guard Derek Anderson will miss 6-to-8 weeks with a knee injury.

Detroit's Lindsey Hunter had 18 points, but missed a 6-metre shot at the buzzer that would have sent the game into overtime. Grant Hill had 19 points and 10 rebounds, but was only 6-for-17 from the field.

Denver Nuggets 110, Dallas Mavericks 98: At Denver, reserve Johnny Newman scored 21 points and Bobby Jackson had 20 points and 11 rebounds as Denver snapped an 11-game home losing streak.

Tony Battie added 19 and Laphonso Ellis had 13 points and a season-high 14 rebounds for Denver, which hadn't won at home since Dec. 7 against the Los Angeles Clippers. The Nuggets won for only the second time in 27 games.

Michael Finley had 38 points for the Mavericks as they lost their 18th straight road game. Dallas had won six of the seven from the Nuggets and hasn't won on the road since Nov. 1 in Seattle.

Phoenix Suns 96, Orlando Magic 94: At Orlando, Florida, Rex Chapman scored eight of his 19 points in the final 37 seconds as Phoenix came from behind to beat Orlando.

Chapman, the hero in a victory over Miami on Friday night, made a clutch 3-point and five free throws down the stretch as Orlando squandered an eight-point lead in the final 2:35.

Cliff Robinson had 10 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter for Phoenix, which went ahead for good on a pair of Chapman free throws with 13.6 seconds remaining.

The loss was the eighth in nine games for Orlando, which snapped a seven-game losing streak at Houston on Thursday night.

Reserve Derek Strong had 25 points and 10 rebounds for the Magic.

Houston Rockets 102, Philadelphia 76ers 86: At Philadelphia, Charles Barkley had 14 points and 15 rebounds as Houston snapped a five-game road losing streak by beating Philadelphia.

Kevin Willis had 18 points, Mario Elie 12 and Eddie Johnson 16 for the rockets, who haven't lost in their last six trips to Philadelphia.

Houston is 3-7 overall in its last 10 games.

The 76ers, who got 22 points from Jim Jackson and 18 points and 12 rebounds from Derrick Coleman, have now lost five in a row after winning five of their previous six.

Atlanta Hawks 103, Charlotte Hornets 83: At Charlotte, North Carolina, Steve Smith and Mookie Blaylock each scored 20 points as Atlanta snapped Charlotte's four-game winning streak.

Chuckie Brown led a 37-point performance from Atlanta's bench, scoring six of his 14 in the decisive fourth-quarter run as the Hawks won their second in a row after a five-game skid.

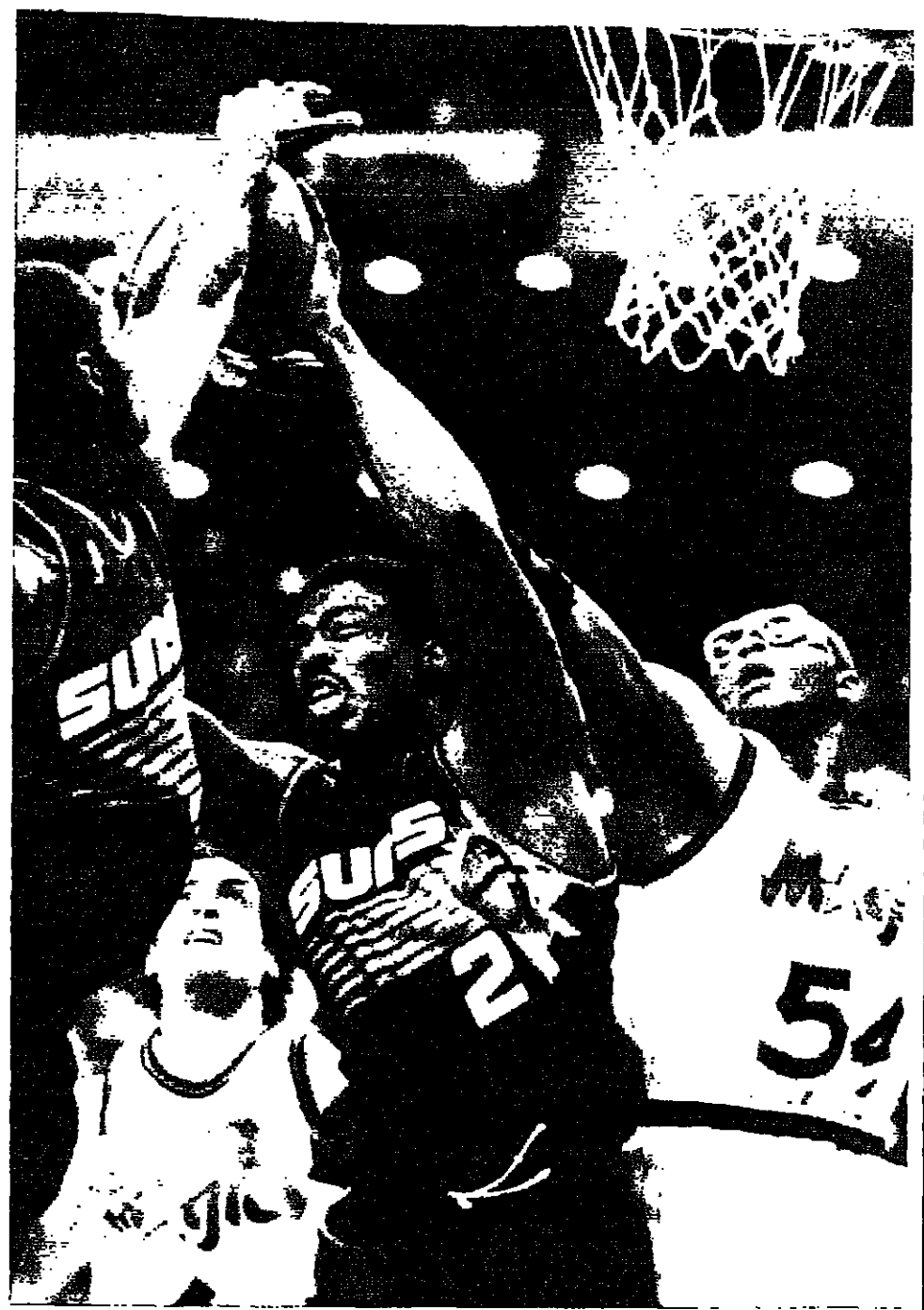
Atlanta harassed Charlotte into 34 per cent shooting, including a 4-for-15 performance by Glen Rice, who had 19 points. Anthony Mason had 11 points and 11 rebounds — his sixth consecutive double-double.

New Jersey Nets 116, Vancouver Grizzlies 106: At Vancouver, British Columbia, Sam Cassell scored 13 of his 26 points in the fourth quarter and New Jersey won its third straight game.

Cassell also had eight rebounds and six assists in the Nets' 26th victory of the season, which equals their entire victory total of last season.

The Nets are now just two games back of Miami in the race for first place in the Atlantic Division.

Shareef Abdul-Rahim led the Grizzlies with 26 points, 15 of them coming in the first quarter.



Phoenix Suns centre Mark Bryant pulls down a rebound from Orlando Magic forward Horace Grant during first half NBA action in the Orlando Arena (Reuters photo)

Maier wins fourth straight Super-G

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN, Germany (AFP) — Hermann Maier of Austria won his fourth straight Super-G race here Sunday, increasing his stranglehold on both the World Cup Super-G and overall standings.

Maier, dubbed "the Herminator" because of his dominance this season, scored his sixth win in 13 speed events this term. He was a clearcut victor in the final men's race before the Winter Olympics start in Nagano, Japan.

Maier clocked 1min 19.79secs on the Kandahar course to win ahead of his compatriot Hans Knauss (1:20.70) and Norwegian Lasse Kjus (1:20.88).

It was Maier's ninth win of the season, following his triumphs in Super-Gs at Beaver Creek and two at Schladming, in downhill at Bormio and Wengen and in three giant slaloms in Park City, Saalbach and Adelboden.

He also finished first in a giant slalom at Va D'Isere before being controversially disqualified for a minor rules infraction.

Maier completed a successful weekend at this German resort. He was third behind compatriot Andreas Schifferer and Frenchman Nicola Burtin in a downhill raced on Saturday.

The signs now look good for Maier in Japan after shin problems which forced him to pull out of the Kitzbuehel downhill last weekend.

Maier's win continued Austrian control of this season's men's events and came on the same course where he scored the first win of his career just 11 months earlier.

The 25-year-old former bricklayer, in only his second season of World Cup competition, is a wild, hell-for-leather competitor, whose teammates affectionately call him "Monster".

Politics forces Skah out of world title bid

TOURCOING, France (AFP) — Morocco's double world cross country champion Khalid Skah said here on Saturday he would not be attempting to win it for the third time this year because he had fallen out with the Moroccan athletics authorities.

The 31-year-old, who won his titles in 1990 and 1991, accused Aziz Daouda, the technical director of the Moroccan Federation, of favouring the athletes who he had a personal interest in and therefore Skah would not run in the championships to be held in Marrakesh on March 21 and 22.

"It's impossible to work with someone who is both the technical director and an athlete's manager, and who favours those he manages," Skah said.

"The Moroccan team in Marrakesh will not be the best team and therefore I have no interest in running there. I will concentrate on the indoor season," he added.

Skah, who won the 10,000 metres Olympic gold in Barcelona in 1992, added that he had not received any financial assistance from the Federation for three years.

"I have been virtually rejected by them and I have taken this decision because I saw no other alternative," Skah said.

United crash to 3rd defeat in 4 games

LONDON (AFP) — Manchester United suffered a major setback in their bid to land a fifth Premier League title in six years when they crashed to a shock 1-0 defeat to Leicester at Old Trafford on Saturday.

Forgotten striker Tony Cottee, a substitute for most of the season, scored the only goal of the game as United slumped to a third league defeat in their last four games and their first at home this season.

The result blows the title race back open, leaving United just four points clear at the top with 14 games left to play.

But Blackburn and Liverpool, second and third before kick-off, failed to take advantage of United's defeat as they battled each other to a goalless draw at Anfield.

United's title odds have been lengthened from 2-9 to 2-7 by bookmakers William Hill who then offer 6-1 Liverpool, 11-1 Blackburn, 14-1 Arsenal and Chelsea.

United manager Alex Ferguson slammed his side's lacklustre performance but denied his team were starting to get nervous.

"I think we got what we deserved," he said. "We were just too casual to win a game of football."

Liverpool failed to exploit United's reverse to the full after missing a string of good chances to beat title rivals Blackburn.

"We deserved the three points," said Liverpool boss Roy Evans. "We were magnificent out there."

"They barely had a shot on target. We had enough chances and proved a few people wrong."

Chelsea's title bid was back on track after a 2-0 win over basement club Barnsley as the Londoners moved up into second from fourth.

Chelsea boss Ruud Gullit said a clear-the-air meeting among the players on Friday had made his team face up to some hard truths about their recent poor performance.

Arsenal kept in touch with the leaders after blitzing Southampton with three goals in seven minutes from Dennis Bergkamp, Tony Adams and Nicolas Anelka.

Gunners manager Arsene Wenger, whose side are now unbeaten in 10 matches, said the title race was wide open again.

"United's defeat today has given hope to everybody else, not just us, but there's no doubt now our unit is stronger than it was and the new players have settled in well," Wenger said.

Tottenham were plunged into further relegation trouble after going down 2-1 at Derby, despite having the better of the play.

Goals from Rod Wallace and Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink gave Leeds a 2-0 win at Crystal Palace, who are yet to win at home in the league this season.

Relegation candidates Bolton suffered a morale-shattering 5-1 home defeat to Coventry, who were the only team in the tightly packed bottom 10 to win.

Sheffield Wednesday's mid-table tussle with Wimbledon at Hillsborough ended 1-1.

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Nigel Mansell takes third spot

CHAMONIX (AFP) — Britain's 1992 F1 World Champion Nigel Mansell, driving a Ford Escort and teamed up with Finland's 1981 World Rally champion Ari Vatanen, finished an encouraging third when he made his ice racing debut in the 24 hours Chamonix event Saturday. He went on to earn a place on the grid for Sunday's final. A delighted Mansell said afterwards: "It was fantastic. Ari had got off to a wonderful start but it was also very tough because the track conditions were changing every lap. As opposed to F1, there is no red flag to stop the race when there are hazards on the track, and that makes it a lot of fun". Mansell also paid tribute to his "fantastic mechanics", who had finished fixing the gearbox only five minutes before the start of the race.

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- A minimum of seven years experience in research, external relations, copy editing or communication related fields preferably in an international context.
- Fluency in English and Arabic, other U.N. languages an asset.
Other Skills:
Excellent computer skills including word processing, data base, desktop publishing and graphics.
Please send detailed resume, in English, quoting reference 1/98 to:
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UNICEF Country Office
P.O. Box 840162, Amman 11184
Fax No. 616947
Applications for this position must be received by February 15, 1998. Acknowledgement will only be sent to short-listed candidates under serious consideration.
UNICEF is a smoke-free environment

Invitation for Pre-Qualification of Contractors For the Construction of Integrated Development Project for the Southern Ghors
The Government of Jordan had the final design and tender documents prepared for the works listed below. It has secured funds from the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development towards the finance of construction and supervision of these works. The three dams listed are to be constructed of Roller Compacted Concrete (RCC) with the properties as described:
• Wala Dam, 49m high, 300m long, 9.3MCM storage capacity, and estimated roller compacted concrete volume 185,000m³.
• Mujib Dam, 62m high, 660m long, 35MCM storage capacity, and estimated roller compacted concrete volume 750,000m³.
• Tannur Dam, 69m high, 240m long, 16.8MCM storage capacity, and estimated roller compacted concrete volume 260,000m³.
• Diversion weir at Mujib, with a 1.3 kms long tunnel, the southern conveyor 73.5 km long, northern conveyor 28 km long, and irrigation infrastructure for 11,862 dunums. It is anticipated that the construction of the project will be divided into five separate contracts;
1. Construction of Wala Dam.
2. Construction of Tannur Dam.
3. Construction of Mujib Dam.
4. Construction of Mujib Weir and Conveyors.
5. Construction of Irrigation Infrastructure.
The Contract Documents and all correspondence related to the contract will be in the English language.
Applications for pre-qualification are invited from International Contractors in association with Jordanian Contractors classified by the Government Tenders Directorate (G.T.D.) as First and Second Grade in the field of:
a) Water and Sewerage or Roads or Concrete/Bridges & Culverts for Contracts 1,2,3 and 4.
b) Water and Sewerage for Contract No. 5.
The International Contractor does not have to include the name of his local associate at the time of pre-qualification, however, the pre-qualification document should include a statement by the international contractor to confirm his commitment to enter into an association at the tender stage with a local contractor, having the same classification stated above, and to submit the association agreement.
International Contractors willing to participate in pre-qualification for the above project are invited to collect the pre-qualification documents in accordance with the following terms:
1. The share of local contractors shall be at least 25% of the total contract value.
2. All given information must be correct and accurate.
3. The International Contractors shall comply with the law of the Jordanian Engineering Association and Jordanian Contractors Association regarding registration.
4. The documents can be purchased for the following non-refundable fee:
a) JD150 for the pre-qualification document of "Wala and Tannur Dams" (one combined document).
b) JD150 for the pre-qualification document of "Mujib Dam."
c) JD150 for pre-qualification document of "Mujib Weir, Tunnel, Conveyors, and Irrigation Infrastructure."
5. The deadline set for the purchase of pre-qualification document shall be on February 10th, 1998.
6. The pre-qualification proposals shall be submitted to the Jordan Valley Authority (address below) not later than 13:00 hours (local time) on March 15th, 1998.
Address
Special Committee for the Mujib and Southern Ghors Project Address: P.O. Box 2769, Amman - Jordan
Fax: 962-6-689916
Tel.: 962-6-689-400
Tel.: 962-6-689-464
Jordan Valley Authority
Secretary General
Dr. Dureid Mahasneh

PLO executive body refuses to confirm changes to charter

RAMALLAH (AFP) — The Palestinian leadership rejected Israeli demands that it clarify the elimination of clauses in the PLO Charter calling for the destruction of the Jewish state, officials said Sunday.

Palestinian officials said the offending clauses had already been annulled in 1996 by the PLO's "parliament," the Palestine National Council (PNC), and accused Israel of using the charter as an excuse to avoid a promised West Bank troop pullback.

The PLO's Executive Committee, meeting late Saturday in the West Bank town of Ramallah, balked at approving a list of specific clauses dropped from the charter, committee members said.

The committee meeting came a day before U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to push a U.S. package plan which trades Israeli implementation of a West Bank troop withdrawal for Israeli fulfilment of Israeli demands.

In 1996, the PNC issued a blanket resolution removing from the 1968 charter en bloc all clauses contradictory to the peace process, but it did not specify the clauses.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the move is not enough to fulfil Palestinian promises to

purge the documents of all references to Israel's destruction. He has demanded the PNC meet again to make more specific changes as a precondition to conducting the troop withdrawal.

His government also rejected a list drawn up as a compromise measure by Mr. Arafat which detailed the specific clauses annulled by the PNC, saying Mr. Arafat's word alone on the clauses was not enough.

Supporters of Mr. Arafat in the 18-member Executive Committee had said before the meeting Saturday that they hoped the body would confirm Mr. Arafat's list, which would in effect give it official PLO backing.

But committee member Samir Ghosheh told AFP on Sunday that the body had decided not to confirm the changes. "No decision was taken [on the charter]," he said.

Changing the charter "is in the power only of the PNC, which has already met. We did not approve the holding of another PNC session," he said.

PNC President Salim Zaatari said the Palestinians "will not call a new session of the PNC," saying the PLO "fulfilled its obligations completely with the 1996 decision."

"We cannot be asked to reconvene the PNC to decide something it has already decid-

ed, Netanyahu is raising this matter only to slander us and as an excuse to get out of implementing its agreements," Mr. Zaatari told journalists in Nablus.

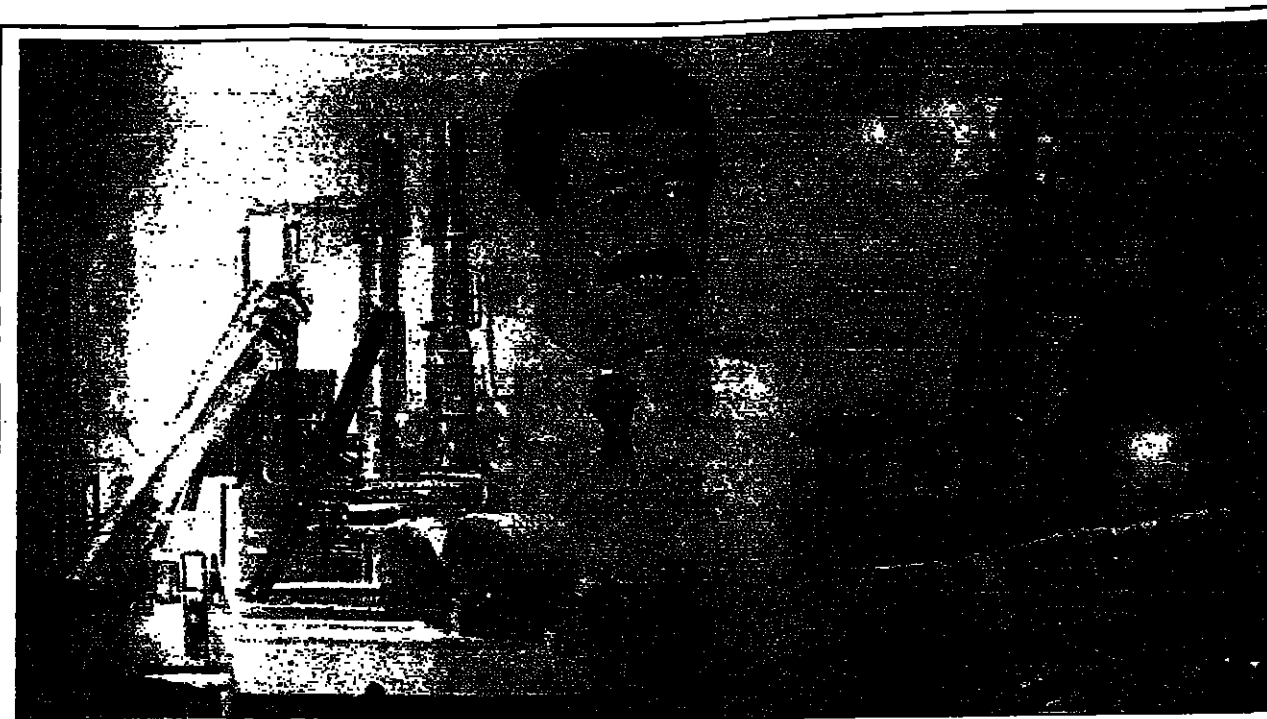
But Mr. Netanyahu's press adviser David Bar-Ilan repeated on Sunday calls for a new PNC session. "There is no other way. These clauses must be eliminated by a two-thirds majority of the PNC," Mr. Bar-Ilan told Israeli radio.

"It is necessary politically and psychologically. We demand the cancelling of these articles which delegitimise us and call for an armed conflict against us," Mr. Bar-Ilan said.

Meanwhile, the Executive Committee also repeated the Palestinian position that Israel must go through with three stages of a West Bank troop withdrawal, rejecting a Netanyahu demand that the Palestinians forgo another stage of the pullback due later this year.

The committee "underscored the necessity of implementing all three stages of the withdrawal in accordance with [self-rule] agreements and in the agreed time frame," the statement said.

It also called for "a halt to all forms of [Israeli] settlement activity and confiscation of lands in the occupied territories."



BETWEEN CONSTRUCTION AND DESTRUCTION: A mural at the Museum of Reconstruction shows Sunday Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in between a painted scene of an attack during the Gulf war and another of the same spot after being reconstructed by the Iraqi authorities. While Russian diplomats are making another effort to end the crisis, tension between Iraq and the U.S. persists over allowing U.N. arms inspectors into sensitive sites like Hussein's palaces (AP photo) (See story on page 1)

Turkey offers mediation, says U.S. strike on Iraq imminent

Officials meet to discuss allowing U.S. strikes against Iraq from Turkish bases

Combined agency dispatches

TURKEY ON Sunday offered to mediate in the crisis over U.N. weapons inspections in Iraq, saying the threat of Western military action against its neighbour was "imminent."

Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem, who met U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the Davos forum of political and business leaders in Switzerland, said his impression was that "a military strike seems imminent. That is why we are trying our best to find a diplomatic solution."

He told Reuters he planned to visit Baghdad "as soon as possible" if Iraq accepted the mediation offer. Iraq has told Turkey it welcomes the initiative and is expected to respond in detail by Monday, Mr. Cem said.

Mr. Cem said Ankara wanted Iraq's neighbours including Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran to join the regional initiative and send their foreign ministers to Baghdad for talks to avert a military showdown. He said the proposal won the backing of Mr. Annan as well as Jordan in talks in Davos.

"There are consultations going on in regional capitals. The initiative is aimed at ending the conflict peacefully," he said. "I am ready to go to Baghdad as soon as possible."

In Ankara, a statement issued at Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz's office said Mr. Cem would visit Baghdad in the coming days.

Mr. Cem said Turkey was also discussing the initiative with U.N. Security Council members but it had yet to hear from Washington, Paris or Moscow.

Meanwhile, Turkish government and military leaders met Sunday to discuss whether to open an allied air base in the south of the country for U.S. strikes against neighbouring Iraq. Mr. Yilmaz and his deputy Bulent Ecevit met with General Cevik Bir, the vice chief of staff, and officials from the foreign ministry in Ankara, the Anatolia news agency reported.

Mr. Ecevit had ruled out opening Incirlik air base for strikes against Iraq on Friday, but Mr. Yilmaz said later that the special meeting on Sunday had been scheduled for a new evaluation of Turkey's stance.

The vice chairman of the U.S. joint chiefs of staff, air force General Joseph Ralston, is due in Ankara on Monday.

Incirlik air base near Adana in the southeast of Turkey was used extensively for air raids against Iraq during the Gulf war of 1991.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Sunday that "all options" remain open in the dispute with Iraq over U.N. arms inspections.

Turkey, meanwhile, closed its border with Iraq on Sunday, according to sources in the region. No official announcement had been made yet.

The border crossing at Habur near Silopi in southeast Turkey was shut Sunday morning, the sources said.

Local sources said the crossing had been closed because Iraq had once again suspended cross-border trade in fuel oil.

Turkish trucks have been transporting cheap fuel oil in containers attached to their trucks from Iraq to Turkey for a number of years.

This technical violation of the embargo against Iraq has been tolerated by the United States because it allows Turkey to recoup some of the losses incurred by the sanctions imposed on Iraq for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

In November, Iraq suspended the trade for nearly a month due to the dispute over U.N. arms inspectors.

Turkey stopped the border traffic during the period to avoid a build-up of trucks at the crossing.

The Sabah daily reported, meanwhile, that Turkey would begin deploying additional troops on the Iraqi border on Sunday, but no movement was visible there on Sunday morning.

U.S. to give Israel vaccine against bio arms — report

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The United States has agreed to an Israeli request for vast quantities of vaccine to counter a possible biological weapons attack by Iraq, the Haaretz newspaper reported Sunday.

Hundreds of thousands of doses of serum, notably to protect against anthrax, will either be prepositioned in Israel for use by Israeli and U.S. troops in the region or be held at the ready for emergency delivery from U.S. stocks, the newspaper reported, quoting U.S. sources.

The Haaretz military corre-

spondent, Zeev Schiff, said Israel requested the vaccine before the current crisis erupted between the United Nations and Iraq over Baghdad's continuing attempts to produce biological and chemical weapons.

Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai confirmed that Israel had obtained vaccine against biological arms, but said there was no link with the current crisis with Iraq.

"Israel has had these vaccines for a very long time, we didn't get them just today," he said. "We have the means to protect

ourselves but it's always better to have more."

The chief U.N. weapons inspector, Richard Butler, said last week that Iraq had already produced enough germ agents, primarily anthrax and botulin toxin, to "blow away Tel Aviv."

During the 1991 Gulf war, Iraq fired 39 Scud missiles with conventional warheads at Tel Aviv, killing two people.

Israeli officials have played down the danger that Iraq would use non-conventional weapons against Israel even if the U.S. carries out threats to attack Baghdad.

Shiite Muslims bury leader as search continues for Tufeili

Combined agency dispatches

ANGRY SHIITE Muslim mourners shouted anti-Hizbollah slogans Sunday as they buried one of their leaders killed in a weekend battle.

Sheikh Khodr Tays was killed along with four other supporters of Shiite cleric Sobhi Tufeili in battles with the Lebanese army in the eastern ancient city of Baalbek.

Three soldiers and a bystander also died and dozens were wounded in the fighting, which erupted Friday evening and ended Saturday.

About 3,000 Shiites, including 500 clerics, took part in Tays' funeral amid tight army security.

His body was driven in an ambulance from Baalbek — where many shops remained closed — to his native town of Briel for burial. A long convoy of cars followed.

Supporters shouted slogans denouncing Hizbollah's mod-

erate leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah. They also shouted against Hizbollah's patron, Iran, and Lebanese leaders.

Troops searched vehicles outside Briel and banned journalists from entering the town to cover the funeral.

Tays, Sheikh Tufeili's top aide, was expelled from Hizbollah a week ago. He was the group's representative in parliament from 1992 to 1996.

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, in the first government reaction to the fighting, said that authorities have been more than patient with Sheikh Tufeili's rebellion.

"He [Tufeili] has been breaking the law for some time... He is 100 per cent responsible for what happened," Mr. Hariri told reporters during a visit to Paris. His comments were carried Sunday on Lebanese television.

The military prosecutor's office on Saturday issued a warrant for Sheikh Tufeili's arrest for "forming an armed

gang and threatening national security."

Meanwhile, the Lebanese military beefed up its troop and tank forces combing the Baalbek area Sunday for Sheikh Tufeili, an army official said.

The military carried out searches in Duris where Sheikh Tufeili's home came under military attack Saturday in Syrian-controlled eastern Lebanon.

The soldiers, who entered each house in the village of 1,500, detained journalists and press photographers, saying they were in a military operations theatre without permission.

Most of them were released after a brief interrogation. Lebanese state prosecutors issued a statement in Beirut Saturday calling for Sheikh Tufeili's arrest "on charges of forming armed groups, endangering national security and killing soldiers and civilians," the army said in a statement.

Germany urges Iran to free condemned businessman; Iran expresses 'surprise' at German reaction to verdict

Combined agency dispatches

GERMANY URGED Iran on Sunday to free a Hamburg businessman sentenced to death by stoning for having forbidden sexual relations with a Muslim woman.

German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel said he and the government were "shocked" by the Tehran court ruling last Monday against 56-year-old businessman Helmut Hofer. He said the sentence violated human rights and justice.

"I urge the Iranian justice authorities to apply humanity and justice," Mr. Kinkel told the Bild Am Sonntag newspaper. "Let Helmut H. go free."

Mr. Kinkel said relations between Iran and Germany would be damaged if the death sentence were enforced.

"There would be no understanding of this sentence, if it is

enforced, in Germany or in the world," Mr. Kinkel said.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry confirmed on Sunday that a German national had gone on trial in Iran but declined to confirm claims by Bonn that he had been sentenced to death.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmoud Mohammadi confirmed that Mr. Hofer had been tried in Iran but did not reveal the charges against him or the sentence in the case.

Quoted by the official Iranian news agency IRNA, the spokesman expressed "surprise" at the reaction of the German government, which he described as "unjustified."

Mr. Mohammadi was quoted by IRNA as saying the trial was held "in a competent court in accordance with the law."

"Given the independence of the judiciary in Iran, the case is proceeding normally," he

added. Mr. Mohammadi said the German embassy in Tehran and the lawyer for the defendant had been "informed of developments from the very beginning."

He expressed "surprise at the reaction and the statements" of the German government and said "linking bilateral relations with the case was unreasonable and unjustified."

Meanwhile, the German Foreign Ministry said that a former economics minister who enjoys close relations with Iran, Juergen Moellmann, was headed for Tehran and was expected to approach Iranian officials.

It stressed, however, that Mr. Moellmann's trip was not an "official mission" related to the case but a previously scheduled visit.

European Union foreign ministers are scheduled to meet

on Feb. 23 to discuss resuming a dialogue with Tehran severed following the April 1997 verdict by the Berlin court.

Relations between Germany and Iran have been improving since they were plunged into crisis in April by a Berlin court ruling that Iran had ordered the murder of four Kurdish dissidents in 1992.

Mr. Kinkel stressed that "Germany and the European Union want a new start in our relations with this important country. A shadow that would come with a death sentence should not be allowed to fall over these new efforts."

New details about the case were reported in Bild Am Sonntag, which published a page one picture of a man being stoned to death under the headline: "This is how a German will be executed — he only kissed a girl."

Power struggle within Hizbollah, army's clashes with Tufeili reflect Lebanon's still unsolved problems

By Jack Redden
Reuters

BEIRUT — The bloody clashes between the army and Shiite cleric Sheikh Sobhi Tufeili reflect the multitude of unresolved obstacles facing Lebanon long after it began climbing back from 15 years of civil war.

Officially the army was just putting an end to over-zealous political agitation by a cleric whose campaign for the poor had descended into a disruptive power struggle with the current leaders of the Shiite organisation Hizbollah.

But the fighting — in which at least eight and possibly more than a score of people were killed — directly touched the interests of the government in

Beirut rebuilding Lebanon, rival domestic political parties jockeying for Shiite support and the numerous Middle East governments still involved in Lebanon.

Sheikh Tufeili had found a rich political vein to mine in the poverty of his native Bekaa Valley, where the fighting took place on Friday and Saturday. His "hunger revolt" declared last July in an effort to extract government aid for the poor drew an enthusiastic response from people who had long felt neglected by the national government.

The lavish rebuilding under way in Beirut since the end of the civil war in 1990 only reinforced the bitterness in the Bekaa Valley. Even by the contrasts traditional in Lebanon,

the gap between poor and rich seems exceptional, fuelling complaints that people have been forgotten in the drive for infrastructure.

Apartments selling for prices in excess of a million dollars are not unusual in Beirut. In the Bekaa, a planner contracted by a nervous government at the start of the "revolt" to start work immediately in the area said just days before the latest trouble that he had yet to see any state funds.

But Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al Hariri was not the only target of Sheikh Tufeili's campaign. The cleric, a political conspirator in both Iran and Iraq before returning to his native Lebanon, was increasingly dissatisfied with the drift of Hizbollah into mainstream

Lebanese politics.

When Sheikh Tufeili led the Islamist Shiite organisation in 1989 it was a guerrilla group accused by Western governments of kidnapping their citizens in Lebanon. The group that started as the angry voice of the country's largest but poorest sect continues to fight Israel's occupation of south Lebanon, but now has its own site on the Internet and seats in parliament.

The rivalry with current leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah reached a climax in January when Sheikh Tufeili held a rival ceremony in the Bekaa's main centre, Baalbek, to mark international Jerusalem Day — an Iranian-inspired celebration of Islam's claim to the city.

Sheikh Nasrallah retaliated a week ago by expelling Sheikh Tufeili from Hizbollah. The enraged cleric fought back with demonstrations in Beirut and warnings of a bloody conflict.

It seemed all too accurate. When Sheikh Tufeili's fighters seized a Hizbollah school on Friday in Baalbek, Hizbollah fighters surrounded the building. The army intervened, initially in an apparent bid to mediate but then in an assault on the school that left many dead and sent Sheikh Tufeili fleeing. That signalled the end of a reluctance by Beirut to move against Sheikh Tufeili that was clear ever since his challenge of the national government — including banning travel by ministers to the Bekaa — began last summer.

Beirut's caution had been understandable, even without its desire to avoid unwelcome attention when trying to project an image of post-war normality. The Bekaa, at various times a centre of car theft, drug production, hostage taking or host to guerrilla organisations, has been under only limited central government control.

Although the Lebanese army has extended its influence, Hizbollah — aided by Iran — remains a major force beyond state control. And Syria keeps many of its estimated 35,000 troops in Lebanon in the Bekaa Valley, where they can protect the Western approaches to Damascus.

Previously, Sheikh Tufeili's conflict with Beirut had been kept under control. It appeared

the Syrians, with no interest in a return to the chaotic civil war years, ensured the cleric cooled his campaign before trouble erupted and kept the Lebanese army from advancing.

Whatever the reason, Syrian troops stood aside this time and let the Lebanese army finally carry out its threat to crush Sheikh Tufeili. That was good news both to his rivals in Hizbollah and the government in Beirut.

Clinton wins award from Brazil's macho men

BRASILIA (R) — Bill Clinton's alleged affair with a former White House intern may have shocked U.S. public opinion, but to Brazil's self-declared macho men, he is a hero. The Macho Movement of Minas Gerais state has named Clinton its Man of the Year in recognition of his alleged antics with Monica Lewinsky. "Over the past year, no-one has done as much as Bill Clinton to honour the traditions of machismo," said Luiz Mario Ladeira, president of the group. Clinton is the first non-Brazilian to win the award. A diploma is in the mail.

Dutch police take no excuses for illegal parking

THE HAGUE (AFP) — Dutch Interior Minister Hans Dijkstal walked to a weekly cabinet meeting, thus saving himself the embarrassment suffered by several colleagues who were fined for illegal parking, press reports said. Police confirmed that, disregarding the strong protests of ministerial chauffeurs, officers had stuck to the rules and slapped a \$45 fine on the official cars of seven ministers. When Dijkstal arrived for the meeting, he was greeted by disgruntled colleagues. His answer did not make them any happier, however. "Were the cars fined because they belonged to ministers? No. Were they fined for illegal parking? Yes," he said. "There is no problem, then."

Iranian youth pays bride price in oil

TEHRAN (AFP) — An Iranian youth paid for his bride with one metric tonne of vegetable oil, after her father said his initial offer of \$10,000 in gold was not enough. The Kayhan newspaper said Saturday. The young man named Hassan first offered 100 gold pieces worth \$10,000, but Fatemeh's father refused and demanded instead 250 four-kg cans of vegetable oil, Kayhan said. The father explained that in Iran "the price of oil is going to go up faster than that of gold in coming years," the paper said.

James Bond is succeeded by Britain's first gay spies

LONDON (AFP) — James Bond, the fictional embodiment of Britain's spy service, has been succeeded by a gay couple, it was reported Sunday. The Sunday Times said Britain's foreign espionage service had sent its first gay couple abroad on a spying mission. The paper added that the two men had been posted to an "interesting" country to gather information. The move is a sea change for MI6, which in the past had ostensibly shunned homosexuals. But, said the Sunday Times, the spy service now took the view that homophobia, like the Berlin Wall, was a thing of the past.

Argentine police fine adventurous young driver

BUENOS AIRES (R) — Argentine police threw the book at Renzo Cistari when they caught him driving an all terrain vehicle — he had no insurance, no registration plates, and he was three years old. Local television and newspapers reported that traffic police stopped Renzo when they found him driving the four-wheel motorcycle-like vehicle on a sidewalk in his home town of Rada Tilly in southern Argentina. The boy's father Roberto Cistari was quoted as saying he would stop Renzo from driving his older brother's vehicle in future.